DEVELOPING YOUTH MINISTRY IN A JOY KOREAN CHURCH THROUGH DRAMAWORSHIP

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ABSTRACT

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Youth ministry in Korean American churches takes place within an intercultural context where second-generation youth often experience cultural confusion, identity ambiguity, and spiritual displacement. This Doctor of Ministry project explores culturally integrated drama worship through a six-week workshop at Joy Korean Church, framing worship within a missional understanding of the church. The central hypothesis is that a six-week implementation of drama worship, combined with intentional small group meetings, will lead to measurable growth in spiritual maturity and identity integration among second-generation Korean American youth.

ABBREVIATIONS

AL	Alabama
BCE	Before Common Era
CIM	China Inland Mission
CM	Children's Ministry
GMC	Global Methodist Church
KC	Korean Speaking Congregation
KM	Korean Ministry
OMF	Overseas Missionary Fellowship
UAH	University of Alabama in Huntsville
UMC	United Methodist Church
US	United States
USA	United States of America
YM	Youth Ministry

"The gospel must be communicated in forms that are meaningful within each culture, for people live within the reality of their own cultural worlds."

— Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*

INTRODUCTION

Out of the quiet where faith meets culture, this study begins. It arises from pastoral life, theological reflection, and years of walking alongside young adults shaped within Korean immigrant families across the United States. Within Korean American churches, young people encounter more than sermons. The church becomes a space of memory, language, belonging, and shared identity. Yet tension emerges as they learn to live between two cultural worlds. Inherited faith meets shifting realities and raises questions of belonging, identity, and purpose. The struggle is seldom disbelief but learning how to live received faith within unfamiliar cultural contexts. In such spaces, ministry begins not with instruction but with listening, creating room for trust, story, and gradual understanding to unfold.

Pastoral experience reveals a recurring pattern among second generation youth. Faith often remains present but does not consistently shape daily life, while identity continues to develop between Korean heritage and American culture. From a missional perspective, this generation must be understood not merely as heirs of tradition but as a mission field within the church itself. Their questions arise not from rejection of faith but from living between cultures where inherited religious language no longer fully communicates meaning. Ministry therefore requires not repetition but translation, the rearticulation of lived faith within their cultural and existential reality.

In response, this study explores drama worship as a form of culturally embodied and participatory worship. Integrating narrative, embodiment, imagination, and Scripture, drama worship invites participants to enter the biblical story rather than remain observers. Through embodied participation, faith becomes lived experience and shapes perception, identity, and practice. Worship shifts from information to encounter, and spiritual formation becomes inseparable from missional awakening, the recognition that one's life participates in God's redemptive work.

The six-week drama worship process at Joy Korean Church in Huntsville Alabama created a relational space that belonged to fostered transformation beyond cognitive learning. Participants began to recognize their own lives within Scripture and integrate faith into everyday living. Such change reflects not only individual formation but also the emergence of a generation learning to live faithfully within its cultural world.

This study draws from biblical theology, the history of Christian worship, intercultural ministry, and educational theory. Together these fields affirm that spiritual formation involves the whole person within community and unfolds through embodied and reflective practice. Using qualitative methods including questionnaires, journals, and interviews, the research traces changes in faith awareness, identity integration, and spiritual engagement across the six-week process.

Grounded in pastoral experience, this study recognizes youth as a decisive season for identity and faith formation. Korean American churches remain vital cultural and relational spaces for many second-generation youth and position youth ministry at the intersection of spiritual formation, cultural identity, and the ongoing mission of the church.

Drama worship represents one response to this reality, creating space where Scripture becomes lived story, faith engages the whole person, and identity forms within a community shaped by grace. In multicultural contexts, faith must be embodied and lived. Within this horizon, culturally grounded Drama worship offers a meaningful pathway toward deeper faith, integrated identity, and holistic formation among Korean American youth.

This DMin project is organized into six chapters, each contributing to the development and evaluation of drama worship as a spiritually formative and culturally responsive model for youth ministry within Korean immigrant churches.

Chapter One, Ministry Focus, presents the ministry context of Joy Korean Church and the lived realities of second-generation Korean American youth. It introduces drama worship as a contextual pastoral response and outlines the researcher's ministry journey and vision for spiritually formative youth ministry. Furthermore, this chapter aimed to justify the necessity of this research.

Chapter Two, Biblical Foundations, establishes the scriptural basis for intergenerational faith formation, focusing on Deuteronomy 6:1–9 and the biblical mandate to nurture covenant identity across generations. Through this biblical study, I have described the necessity for gospel education for the next generation within immigrant churches today, based on the circumstances of Israel during the Exodus.

Chapter Three, Historical Foundations, examined Charles Wesley's cultural ministry. It explores Charles Wesley's dedication to developing Christian worship and formative practices, revealing how significant his cultural approach was. Furthermore, it

sought to explain how valuable this cultural approach, known as drama worship, is for the next generation in immigrant churches.

Chapter Four, Theological Foundations examined Paul Hiebert's incarnational ministry, which achieved an evangelical integration of missiology and cultural anthropology. This chapter presents the theological framework for drama worship, proposing worship as transformative participation in God's redemptive drama based on drama theology, incarnational ministry, and participatory ecclesiology.

Chapter Five, Interdisciplinary Foundations, based on Clifford Geertz's cultural theory, particularly the method of thick description, this chapter interprets drama worship as a multi-layered cultural and symbolic practice. Specifically, it examines how Korean American immigrant youth embrace Christianity through Geertz's cultural perspective on religious interpretation. Furthermore, from this viewpoint, drama worship becomes a formative space where participants not only reenact biblical narratives but also reinterpret faith, identity, and meaning within their own cultural worlds, revealing missional and formative implications for second-generation Korean youth.

Chapter Six, Project Analysis, evaluates the six-week drama worship implementation through qualitative research, analyzing changes in spiritual awareness, faith integration, worship engagement, and identity development, and reflects implications for future ministry practice.

In combination, these chapters present drama worship as a biblically grounded, theologically coherent, and contextually responsive model for youth ministry, contributing both to academic reflection and to the lived practice of immigrant church ministry

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Out in the U.S., Korean American churches adapt to shifting cultural landscapes - driven by who moves where, how families change, and how identity shifts. A good number began years ago when newly arrived immigrants sought comfort, familiar roots, and connection through faith. Still, young adults born to those immigrants often sit in between - influenced by Korean traditions but raised in United States. Because of these factors, people often struggle with mixed cultural identities, inner conflicts about who they are, and feelings out of place spiritually. Therefore, faith might shrink into private routines, separated from real life, losing its connection to daily reality. Being part of a youth program in a Korean immigrant church means paying close attention - not only to personal change but also to how belief reshapes identity when different worlds come together.[1]

In this service setting, drama worship at Joy Korean Church takes shape as a deliberate way to help young people grow spiritually. Not just showtime but something

[1] On the historical development and social role of Korean American immigrant churches as ethnic, cultural, and religious homes for first-generation immigrants and sites of identity negotiation for their children, see Kwang Chung Kim and Sharon A. Kim, *The Korean American Church in the United States* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2005). For analysis of second-generation Korean Americans' hybrid identities, spiritual struggles, and experiences of being "in between" cultures within church contexts, see Sharon Kim, *A Faith of Our Own: Second-Generation Spirituality in Korean American Churches* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010); and Pyong Gap Min and Jung Ha Kim, eds., *Religion and Spirituality in Korean America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2023).

more, a way of honoring faith using story, movement, and scripture woven into daily life. By joining in, teens step out of watching roles and become part of the moment, allowing truth to become real and changing inside them. When people live out meaning in their bodies, their trust grows stronger, folding faith into ordinary moments. Meanwhile, drama worship opens shared ground where young adults of Korean descent test who they are, blending heritage with belief, shaped by connection and purpose.

Shaped by decades spent pastoring and thinking deeply about faith in Korean immigrant congregations, this service form took shape slowly. Working alongside young adults raised between cultures opened new understanding, revealing how traditional teaching alone often failed to nurture the whole person. Out of these experiences emerged a ministry approach attentive to mind, heart, relationships, and embodied expression. drama worship therefore became not merely a method but a contextual response to the lived realities of bicultural identity within immigrant church communities.

Right off, this part looks at how Korean American churches serve their communities while young adults raised in the United States face ongoing struggles of belonging and identity. Within this framework, the development of the drama worship program at Joy Korean Church becomes visible, showing how pastoral insight, theological reflection, and lived ministry experience shaped its present form. The author's pastoral journey, shaped through years of study and ministry practice, informs every stage of the project's design and implementation.

The third part examines how ministry environments influence the formation of self among youth, demonstrating the need for worship practices that resonate authentically within multicultural realities. In such spaces, worship becomes more than

ritual, it becomes a formative encounter where faith, identity, and community converge. Participants are invited to engage in Scripture not only intellectually but relationally and experientially, allowing faith to be embodied in lived experience.

Finally, this chapter introduces the drama worship spiritual formation project, outlining its purpose, structure, and anticipated contribution to nurturing both spiritual depth and cultural integration among second generation Korean American youth. Through intentional practice, reflective engagement, and communal participation, the project seeks to cultivate a faith that is both deeply rooted and contextually alive, forming individuals who can live out their Christian identity with clarity, resilience, and purpose within a multicultural world.

Context

Joy Korean Church in Huntsville

Joy Church began in 1997 as "First Korean Methodist Church of Huntsville". At the time, Huntsville was home to engineers working for Korean company LG, international students studying at the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH)[2], professors working at UAH, and Koreans running small businesses.[3] Huntsville is currently one of the fastest-growing cities not only in Alabama but across the entire United States. As the city expands, migration from surrounding areas is increasing,

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[2] University of Alabama in Huntsville, *"Class Profile,"* Undergraduate Admission, accessed February 3, 2024, https://www.uah.edu/admissions/undergraduate/discover-uah/class-profile

[3] Joy Korean Church, "About Us," accessed February 3, 2024, https://www.joyumc.org/about-us.

naturally leading to a rise in the Asian population and households with multicultural backgrounds.[4]

Joy Korean Church was originally established following a split within Huntsville Korean Baptist Church. As a result of this division, a group of members sought to plant a new congregation. With the support of the local Methodist district superintendent at the time, they were able to establish a Methodist church.

The district superintendent demonstrated a strong commitment to the development of Joy Korean Church. Possessing a missionary vision for Korean American ministry, he actively supported the newly formed congregation, and through his assistance the church continued to grow and establish itself within the local Korean American community.

In the early 2000s, the church moved to its current location, Asbury United Methodist Church (UMC), after the departure of the first pastor and under the leadership of the second pastor, Rev. Yohan Hong. Administratively, Joy Church existed as a Korean Congregation within Asbury UMC, and as a satellite church rather than an independent charter church.[5]

Sudden Absence of Leadership

After Pastor Hong transferred, Pastor Sang Rak Joo became the third pastor and the church began to grow, but he had to suddenly return to Korea due to unresolved green

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[4] Huntsville, "Huntsville Prioritizes Smart Growth as Population Continues to Increase," accessed February 25, 2026, https://www.huntsvilleal.gov/huntsville-prioritizes-smart-growth-as-population-continues-to-increase.

[5] Joy Korean Church, "*About Us*," accessed February 3, 2024, https://www.joyumc.org/about-us.

card and visa issues, leaving the church without leadership. Soon after, Pastor Dong Yeon Kim became the fourth pastor, but he also had to return to Korea because of problems with his military discharge documents. Repeated sudden departures caused disappointment and distrust among the members. During this difficult season, a new pastor was called, and I became the fifth pastor of Joy Church. The frequent changes in senior pastors at the church and the resulting absence of pastoral care could be considered another problem facing Joy Church.

Because the two previous pastors had been required to leave the church unexpectedly, many members were understandably anxious that I might also depart under similar circumstances.

COVID-19 and Its Impact on Joy Church Ministry

On top of that, 2020 was the year of the coronavirus outbreak.[6] I arrived at Joy Church on March 1, 2020, and on March 15, 2020, the state-imposed lockdown. Within two weeks of my arrival, we were unable to hold face-to-face worship services.

With three pastors already having to leave the church at short notice, having to hold services virtually was clearly not a good situation for the church. However, by God's grace, the church was able to take a pause during this time of unplugged worship, and during that pause, people were able to go through a process of healing the negative thoughts they had about the church and the wounds they had received from it. The crisis of the coronavirus became a call to action. As COVID-19 measures began to wind down

[6] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *"CDC Museum COVID-19 Timeline,"* accessed February 23, 2026, https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html.

in 2021, the Church of Joy was able to hold in-person services again. While some families have left the church since the pandemic, new families have enrolled.

As of 2023, the church has ten enrolled families and about fifteen people attending Sunday services. In addition, the total number of children worshiping in the children's ministry is eight. Over the course of three years, by God's grace, Joy Church has experienced both inward and outward growth. Of course, there is still a lot of work to be done. But it is not a church that can easily foresee a negative future, and I believe it is time for a rebirth.

By the grace of the Lord, we have many of the next generation of children attending our church, which is large for our size. As a pastor, I feel responsible for their spiritual growth. However, the reality is that our church cannot provide them with a complete faith education due to practical difficulties - lack of human resources or programs. In addition, we grew up in different environments, and our immigration backgrounds are all different. I believe that it is our mission to bring different cultures together and to build up the church as the body of Christ, and I intend to do this faithfully as a church leader.

In August 2023, the congregation formally transitioned into the Global Methodist Church and now operates as a member church of the Korean American Annual Conference, a shift that has significantly shaped its ecclesial identity and ministry context.[7]

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[7] Korean American Global Methodist Church, *"History,"* accessed February 23, 2026, https://kagmc.org/history/.

God's Grace Poured out during Suffering

Since that transition, the congregation has continued to grow into a multigenerational community spanning from early childhood to young adulthood. What began as a modest immigrant fellowship has gradually developed into a more structured and vibrant body of believers, marked by expanding ministries and deepening communal bonds. The children's ministry has grown steadily, providing a nurturing and joyful environment where young children are introduced to faith through worship, storytelling, and relational care. As these children advance into adolescence, the youth ministry has become a central space for spiritual formation, discipleship, and identity development, particularly for those navigating bicultural realities.

Right alongside growth elsewhere, youth ministry shifted into a lively space where people wrestle with purpose, belief, and where they're headed - guided by Bible verses and personal stories. Through every stage, there's been care to build steady paths of spiritual growth, linking lives across ages while shaping shared habits around prayer, teaching, and helping others. With time unfolding across ages, the body gained deeper roots, turning its attention toward how it serves - becoming a place that nurtures inner change and responds thoughtfully to community needs, standing distinct within Korean American church life.

Ministry Journey

Most of my ministry journey has taken place overseas, in Australia and the United States. These experiences have helped me establish my identity as a minister, providing

opportunities to observe the lives of immigrant churches and the young people within them.

Formation Of Calling and Pastoral Vision

I was born and raised in a Christian family. My maternal great-grandfather, the Rev. Sang-Hak Cho (1877-1950)[8] was martyred during the Korean War while defending the church where he was stationed. From a young age, I heard about my grandfather's faith. With this religious background, it was natural for me to attend church and start practicing my faith. My childhood memories of church are still a strong pillar.

Raised inside a household rooted in Christianity - faith shaped both identity and surroundings. Weekend gatherings at church held laughter mixed with learning, still, belief came more from tradition than choice. That shift began quietly during a retreat just past my eleventh school year; warmth of an unseen kind settled deep, altering what came naturally before. That instant, their belief slipped into mine. God started showing up like a real Dad, not just an idea. His kindness hit deep, then pulled out a quiet yes to follow harder, give more. Ever since, going to church meant something deeper than hanging out; it linked to truth, thus I joined youth praise vocals and leadership tasks. That moment when Jesus showed up in my life back then - it stuck, really. Shaped how I see ministry now, how I understand prayer, even how I talk about God to younger people.

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[8] PCK Martyrs Memorial Mission Association, "Jochanghak (조상학, 1877–1950)," *Introduction to Martyrs*, accessed April 24, 2025, https://pck-pcmma.com/134/?bmode=view&idx=1703522.

As my sense of calling grew, I sought counsel from my senior pastor, who advised me to first "know the world" before entering seminary. Following his guidance, I studied economics at a university in South Korea.

During college, I served as president of the drama club, an experience that sharpened my communication skills and deepened my appreciation for embodied expression, resources that later became unexpectedly significant in ministry. I also spent three months volunteering at the University of the Nations in Kona, Hawaii, where living among students from many nations expanded my vision for cross-cultural ministry.

After the military service I returned to school. At the time, I accepted an opportunity to serve as a worship leader at a Korean immigrant church in Australia in 2006. While working part-time to support myself, I learned that pastoral ministry requires not only competence but also character, endurance, and holistic integrity. That season provided close exposure to immigrant church realities and awakened a lasting interest in diaspora ministry.

Eventually, I moved to the United States for theological training at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (CUME, Boston)[9], concentrating in urban ministry and practical theology. This period included both God's provision through meaningful relationships and personal challenges related to academic intensity and cross-cultural adjustment. Through these struggles, I learned the importance of discipline, resilience, and dependence on grace.

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[9] Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, "CUME's Campus & Community," *Campus for Urban Ministerial Education*, accessed February 25, 2024, https://www.gordonconwell.edu/cume/campus/

After marriage and the beginning of our family life, I entered full-time ministry in Montgomery, Alabama, serving as a youth pastor in a Korean American church. This role grounded my pastoral identity and strengthened my conviction that adolescence is a critical season for spiritual formation. After several years, I discerned a call to senior leadership and became the lead pastor at Joy Korean Church in the Huntsville–Madison area. Soon after arriving, the COVID-19 pandemic created severe disruption and decline. Yet, through sustained pastoral presence and God's grace, the church gradually stabilized and began to grow again. Serving bi-vocationally during this season also deepened my understanding of immigrant church ministry and sharpened my commitment to faithful, contextual discipleship.

Across these seasons, personal conversion, cross-cultural experiences, youth ministry, and immigrant church leadership—God has formed my calling and pastoral vision. These experiences provide the lived background for this doctoral project and its focus on spiritually formative, contextually resonant ministry practices among second-generation Korean American youth.

From those times forward - when things shifted inside me, I met new cultures, walked beside teens, guided fledgling communities born from elsewhere - a quiet trail began forming in my calling. Each moment stood apart, yet flowed like seasons turning, carrying movement, change, confusion, stillness. What once felt distant now touches reality, giving form to what follows, especially the deeper pull toward serving young adults caught between heritages and identities. What shaped Ministry wasn't a plan at first, it came from seeing teens struggle with belief, culture, and who they are among different worlds.

Back then, as a teenager, I started sensing what felt like home. In quiet moments - hardly ever seen by people around me - there was a soft push, an unshakable feeling that life had another layer built in. Not flashy scenes or sudden lights; instead, slow turns of thinking, praying, wondering - each one reshaping how belief sat inside me. That moment didn't set me on a path right away, still it left something small behind. Over years, that faint trace kept moving, quietly expanding without notice.

Later, stepping beside teens in religious work, certain habits started standing out - quietly altering how I saw their path toward deeper belief. Noticing, too, that real inner change didn't wait its turn; it surfaced sooner than many assume, even before most agree adolescence truly begins. Some kids faced tough soul questions: who am I, where do I fit, why is this all happening. Right there, in the messiness of doubt, quiet shifts in trust began, soft but real. What happened shifted how I saw teenage growth - once thought of as stages neatly lined up, now blurring into one another. Earlier ideas about pure childlike belief giving way to real adulthood lose their sharp edges here.

Pastoral Insight into Youth Spiritual Formation

Over time, I saw youth ministry changed. It stopped being just about preparing teens for later steps. Instead, it became where lasting inner growth happens. Because of this shift, interacting with youth felt different - more grounded. My view of pastoring them evolved too, stretching beyond quick fixes toward slower, steadier walking beside. From those moments grew a path in ministry shaped by real encounters. It took root slowly, unfolding now as a way to help young people grow spiritually. Their sense of self

is shaped here through steady support. Lasting belief forms here, built over time rather than rushed. Second-generation Korean Americans find space to explore who they are.

Developing the Synergy

This study will be based on my life, my education, and my life experiences as God has faithfully guided me. I was born in Korea but have been living abroad for about twenty years. During that time, I have developed an identity that differs from those who grew up and worked in Korea, and alongside this identity, I have been pastoring a Korean American immigrant church. Having served as the senior pastor of an immigrant church for the past four and a half years, I have come to a clearer understanding of my role in ministry. Through this study, I seek to identify areas of my ministry that require further growth and refinement, and to apply effective and contextually appropriate ministry practices for the spiritual formation and development of the church. As Paul's humble leadership sustained and advanced his missionary calling, I desire my ministry to reflect the incarnational model of Jesus Christ.

At the same time, this vision is deeply rooted in my own spiritual journey. During my youth, I experienced a transformative encounter with Jesus Christ that shaped the direction of my life and awakened a clear sense of calling toward ministry. From that formative season, I came to believe that God had entrusted me with a particular burden and responsibility for young people. Having personally experienced the changing power of faith during adolescence, I remain convinced that the youth stage of life holds unique potential for deep spiritual transformation. This conviction has continued to guide my ministry and has significantly shaped both the focus and purpose of this study.

Vision For Next Generation

> All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be peace of your children. In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you. (ESV)[10]
>
> (Isaiah 54:13-14)

The face of the United States of America, especially in urban centers, is changing and diversifying rapidly. Diversity is the nature of the New Jerusalem, the kingdom of God. In this vision, no one is fitted into the same form or dress, but the people gather before God in their differences and cultural distinctiveness.[11] I have been working with international students in Boston for 18 months and this opportunity provides me with a chance to look at international student's life at a close range.

As a Christian leader, I believe that the local church is the primary place for people to hear and experience the gospel, to grow in their faith, to serve and to build one another up, and to be equipped to work for the peace and prosperity of their cities and communities. Especially, the church has a responsibility to nurture the young generation. We should pass on the inheritance of good Christianity to our next generation. I unquestionably believe that we can know God better every day through personal time with Him. Therefore, developing a good Christian educational program is essential for growth and for seeing what God is doing in the world. As responsible Christians we usually will need to make a chance to spiritual support ourselves.

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[10] Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

[11] Bianca Duemling, "Intercultural Unity, a Sign of the New Jerusalem: Overcoming Barriers and Getting Ready for Church Collaborations across Cultural Lines", in *Reaching for the New Jerusalem: A Biblical and Theological Framework for the City*, ed Seong Hyun Park, Aída Besançon Spencer and William David Spencer, The Urban Voice Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 98.

Bianca Duemling also pointed out that "urban church leaders are forced to navigate not only denominational or theological differences but also cultural differences and related power dynamics".[12] I did not consider the distinct characteristics of the international students. Also, I misunderstood what the Kingdom of God is. I believed we could establish or experience of the Kingdom of God through Bible study or intellectual education. The book I chose for the material has an apologetic character and is very intellectual. I do not intend to ignore the importance of the apologetic process in Christianity but before approaching this method we should consider the character of congregation. In the same way Jesus Christ came into the world as a human (John1:18) and lived together with His disciples, I wish to live together with my community. I also expect my community could see the Kingdom of God through my life, just as Jesus' disciples could see the kingdom of God through his life.

I believe that the local church is the primary place for people to hear and experience the gospel, to grow in their faith, to serve and to build one another up, and to be equipped to work for the peace and prosperity of their cities and communities. Especially, I believe the local church has a pivotal role to educate the youth generation. The church has a responsibility to nurture the next generation. We should pass on inheritance of good Christianity to our children. Therefore, I wish to suggest the model of youth ministry. This project particularly focused on Korean immigrant youth ministry.

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[12] Bianca Duemling, *Reaching for the New Jerusalem: A Biblical and Theological Framework for the City*, 100.

The United States is a nation of immigrants.[13] Since the Mayflower pilgrims reached American shores in the early seventeenth century, this land has been viewed by many international migrants as the "Promised Land" in which they can start lives anew and rebuild homes. Hundreds and thousands of people have entered the country year by year. The majority stayed on and settled. The waves of immigration ebb and flow, but the nation has grown even at low tide, thanks to the self-selected, innovative, persistent, and resilient stream of newcomers.[14]

While there are many signs of the growth and vitality of Korean American congregations in the U.S., there is no hard evidence to indicate whether church ministries are effective or ineffective with Korean American second-generation teens and young adults. However, there are signs to suggest that many of these young Korean American second-generation youth have left or are leaving the churches of their parents. Although statistics are not available, recent surveys suggest that in the early 1990s, 80-90% of second-generation Korean Americans left the Korean American churches after college.

Beginning in the early 1990s, ministers began to refer to this phenomenon as the 'silent exodus,' a term later borrowed by social scientists. The term was later borrowed by social scientists. Many immigrants' Asian families have developed their Christian faith or have become Christians. They raise their children in church, but the children do not always adopt the faith for themselves. This is true of any child raised in the church. Particularly in the Asian North American Church setting, the departure of children from

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[13] Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 3.

[14] Min Zhou & Carl L.Bankston*, The Rise of the New Second Generation Immigration and Society* (Malden, MA: Polity Press. Kindle Edition,2016), 11.

the church is referred to as “the silent exodus.” It is silent in that it is “happening almost unnoticed,” and it is an exodus “because the size of the departure is massive and the numbers staggering.[15]

However, Christianity is very important to the Korean American community. Close to one hundred percent of Korean American youths have been to even non-Christian parents encourage their children to go to a Korean American Church at some point in their life. Even non- Christian parents encourage their children to go to a Korean American Church to gain exposure to other Korean American teenagers and to learn about the Korean culture.[16] Although patterns of immigration, community formation, and religious participation have evolved over time, the Korean immigrant church has historically served as the central institution of the Korean American community, functioning as both a religious and socio-cultural gathering place.[17]

Within this reality, my own life journey and pastoral experience intersect meaningfully with the focus of this study. Having received a clear sense of calling during my youth and having personally experienced deep spiritual transformation in that formative season, I have long recognized the profound potential of youth ministry as a space where faith, identity, and life direction are shaped.

Throughout my ministry, I have repeatedly witnessed significant spiritual and personal change among youth navigating similar cultural and existential tensions. These

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[15] Daniel L. Wong, “The Asian North American Experience”, in *Finding Our Voice: A Vision for Asian North American Preaching* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 38.

[16] Heerak Christian Kim, “Korean -American Youth Identity and 9/11. *An Examination of Korean – American Ethnic Identity in Post – 9/11 America* (NJ: Highland Park, 2006), 48.

[17] Jung-Ho Oh, “From Silent Exodus to Silent Divergence: Changing Immigrant Society, Unchanging Immigrant Church,” *Journal of Language, Culture, and Religion* 2, no. 2 (2021).

experiences form a natural connection with the purpose of this dissertation, which seeks to explore how spiritually formative and contextually resonant ministry, particularly through drama worship, can nurture authentic faith and integrated identity among second generation Korean American youth.

General Nature and Content of the Project

As I mentioned earlier, I served as president of the drama club during my undergraduate years, and I can attest to the power of theater. Drama is inherently compelling; it has the capacity to move people deeply. Because our lives are shaped by narrative, and the Bible itself unfolds as God's grand drama, I believe this method can help bridge many forms of division. Drama does not discriminate between generations, genders, or life situations—it speaks a universal language. It was also during my youth that I encountered a profound and transformative experience of faith. That moment became a turning point in my life, leading me to surrender myself fully to Jesus Christ.

In contrast, many of the second-generation students I interviewed expressed a lack of engagement with traditional church programs. What they learn in church often feels disconnected from their lived reality, and the gospel is frequently perceived as abstract or distant. Even among older generations, it is not uncommon to hear that sermons or teachings are difficult to understand or apply. While the truth of the gospel ultimately transcends the limits of human reason, it is not therefore meant to remain inaccessible. Although there were aspects of Jesus that were not easily understood, he is ultimately the one who makes God fully known. In this sense, Jesus is not only the embodiment of the

incarnational gospel but also the model of its communication—he meets people where they are, stands alongside them, and speaks in ways that penetrate the heart.

From this perspective, the breakdown of communication between God and humanity can be understood as sin, while the restoration of that communication is reconciliation. Communication, therefore, lies at the very heart of the gospel: the gospel is both the content being communicated and how relationship is restored. When we take seriously that worship itself is an act of communication, we begin to reimagine preaching not as a one-directional delivery, but as a shared space in which the congregation can "breathe" together with the message.

Importantly, the students I interviewed expressed pride in their bilingual identity. This challenges the common assumption that second-generation immigrants are difficult to reach due to language barriers. In reality, the issue is not primarily linguistic but methodological. The difficulty lies less in what language is used and more in how the gospel is communicated. This calls for greater intentionality and creativity in sermon delivery, especially engaging in the cultural and emotional world of the next generation.

My own journey as an immigrant has further deepened this conviction. Living between cultures has given me a unique lens through which to understand the complexities, tensions, and possibilities that shape the lives of second-generation youth. This lived experience allows me not only to recognize their struggles but also to resonate with their questions of identity, belonging, and faith in a culturally hybrid world.

In reflecting on my own faith story, I am reminded that it was during my youth that I first came to know Jesus Christ personally. That encounter gave direction and purpose to my life and ultimately led me into full-time ministry. Adolescence is a

formative season—marked by a search for identity, meaning, and belonging—and it is often during this time that individuals are most open to encountering Christ in a deeply personal way.[18] For this reason, youth ministry cannot be treated as secondary or optional; it must be regarded as central to the mission of the church. It is a vital space for holistic gospel proclamation and intentional discipleship.

This conviction has been shaped not only by theological reflection but also by pastoral experience. I have witnessed firsthand that when the gospel is presented in ways that engage the body, mind, heart, and spirit, it has the power to transform the trajectory of a young person's life. This has led me to continually seek and develop meaningful and contextually relevant forms of ministry for youth within immigrant church settings.

At the same time, many immigrant churches in the United States—particularly smaller congregations—face significant limitations in both human and material resources. While it would be ideal to raise and appoint culturally and generationally attuned ministers, the reality is often quite different. Many younger ministers are drawn to larger urban centers where there are greater cultural and educational opportunities. As a result, smaller Korean immigrant churches in mid-sized or smaller cities frequently struggle to sustain robust next-generation ministries.

In response to these challenges, I propose an approach centered on intergenerational education, with "drama worship" as a key practical tool. This model not only maximizes existing resources within the church but also creates a shared space where different generations can encounter the gospel together participating, embodying,

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[18] David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 25–27.

and communicating the story of God in ways that are both deeply theological and culturally resonant.

Conclusion

The intrinsic legitimacy of drama worship does not lie merely in expanding artistic expression, but in its theological grounding in humanity's calling to participate in the divine drama of salvation. Hans Urs von Balthasar[19], in his monumental *Theo-Drama,* portrays God as the author and director of the divine play, with Christ as its central actor. Humanity, therefore, is not invited to remain passive spectators but to become active participants within this redemptive drama.[20]

Jacob Lett[21], in Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology of Representation: God, Drama, and Salvation, interprets this participation through the theological concept of '*Stellvertretung*' (representation), arguing that Christ's act of standing in the place of humanity reveals a trinitarian self-giving that opens space for others and draws them into God's salvific action.[22]

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[19] Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) was a Swiss theologian widely regarded as one of the greatest theologians and spiritual writers of modern times. Named a cardinal by Pope John Paul II, he died shortly before being formally inducted into the College of Cardinals. He wrote over one hundred books, including Prayer, Heart of the World, Mary for Today, Love Alone Is Credible, Mysterium Paschale and his major multi-volume theological works: The Glory of the Lord, Theo-Drama and Theo-Logic.

[20] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 15–30.

[21] Jacob Lett, B.A. (MidAmerica Nazarene University), M.A. (NTC), Ph.D. (NTC), Senior Lecturer in Theology, Dean of Faculty, and Vice Principal (Academics), Nazarene Theological College.

[22] Jacob Lett, *Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology of Representation: God, Drama, and Salvation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2023), 41–44.

Representation, therefore, is not a merely symbolic transfer but a participatory reality in which believers are invited to embody and enact God's redemptive movement. In this light, drama worship becomes more than performance; it is a practice of representational participation. Participants do not simply reenact biblical narratives but experience standing "in the place of the other," embodying the tensions, faith struggles, and redemptive hope of the biblical story.

As Lett suggests, Christ's representative act extends in participatory form to the community of believers, allowing them to enter the divine drama as responsive agents. Through embodied storytelling, worshipers internalize Scripture not only cognitively but existentially, encountering salvation as lived participation rather than abstract doctrine. Furthermore, Balthasar's dramatic theology highlights the spatial and communal nature of representation. Worship becomes a "place-event" where God, humanity, and community meet in a sacred relational space. Within this theological framework, drama worship emerges as a legitimate and formative ecclesial practice that trains the church to live representationally standing before God for the world and before the world as witnesses of Christ.

As a senior pastor of a small immigrant church with limited resources, I encounter the ongoing challenge of cultivating sustainable and meaningful intergenerational ministry. Cultural, linguistic, and generational gaps often hinder mutual understanding and spiritual formation within immigrant congregations. I have come to believe that drama worship, when integrated with an intentional small-group framework, holds transformative potential for bridging these divides. In the embodied storytelling of drama worship, younger and older generations gather not as spectators but as co-creators of

sacred narratives. This participatory space allows cultural memories to be shared, biblical truths to be internalized, and personal and communal identities to be explored within the safety of covenantal community. Over time, I have witnessed how drama awakens empathy, provokes deep spiritual reflection, and fosters authentic intergenerational bonds that conventional ministry models often fail to cultivate. Through this Doctor of Ministry project, I seek to critically examine, further develop, and systematically implement this participatory model of Drama worship. My aim is to construct a replicable ministry framework for immigrant churches—one that is theologically grounded in representational participation, culturally attentive, and spiritually formative. Ultimately, I envision a worshiping community in which drama is not merely a method of expression but a medium of transformation, drawing participants into the ongoing drama of God's redemptive work in the world.

I propose that drama worship can serve as a missional bridge for the next generation in immigrant churches. It is the optimal method for engaging young participants who lose interest in worship due to cultural and linguistic barriers. Within a cultural environment shaped by narrative, imagery, and participation, drama offers a holistic communication approach that integrates cognitive, emotional, and embodied experiences. Rather than positioning the next generation of believers as passive listeners, drama invites them to become participants within biblical narratives. This allows them to encounter the gospel not merely as a doctrinal assertion, but as a lived and experienced reality. In this sense, drama becomes a formative space where faith is not simply transmitted, but embodied and practiced within the community.

The drama naturally fosters intergenerational collaboration. Older members contribute wisdom, memory, and theological depth, while younger participants bring creativity, linguistic flexibility, and cultural awareness. Through shared participation in dramatic worship, the church becomes a dialogical community where the gospel is communicated across generational boundaries. This process reflects the incarnational pattern of Christ, who communicated divine truth through presence, story, and relational engagement rather than abstraction alone.[23] Drama therefore functions not only as a pedagogical tool but as a reconciliatory practice, restoring communication where generational, cultural, and linguistic fragmentation once existed.

Moreover, drama worship contributes to the missional formation of second-generation believers. By entering and embodying biblical narratives, participants learn to locate their personal and communal stories within the larger story of God's redemptive mission. This process nurtures spiritual imagination, strengthens belonging, and cultivates a sense of vocation as participants begin to see themselves not merely as recipients of faith but as active participants in God's mission in the world. The gospel, therefore, moves from abstraction to lived reality, shaping identity, purpose, and witness. I view the immigrant next generation within our church as a mission field with a different cultural background than my own. Therefore, I will use drama worship as a missionary

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[23] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 98–103. Vanhoozer describes the gospel as God's "theo-drama" and the church as the faith community that jointly performs this drama, arguing that the church's identity is formed through participation (performance) that transcends time and culture. Here, Scripture is the authoritative "script," and the church is understood as a catholic community that interprets and acts out this script together across generations and cultures. The expressions "intergenerational cooperation," "dialogical community," and "Christ as the incarnational pattern" in the presented paragraph summarize and apply Vanhoozer's discussion that drama becomes the stage where the church jointly performs the gospel within precisely this theological framework.

tool for them. And I hope that drama worship, as this missionary tool, will function effectively.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

> 1“Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, 2 that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. 3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. 4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (ESV)[1]

Introduction

In verse one**,** in Hebrew, the opening words ‘*And* this is the command (sing.), the decrees and the laws’ pick up and repeat 5:31, with the addition that Moses is now passing on exactly what the *Lord your* God directed me to teach you to do, repeating the

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

original purpose of 1:1–5.[2] Moses lists for them the essentials they must remember once they have taken possession of the land. His advice becomes programmatic for the generations of Israel to come.[3] This means that Deuteronomy 6:1-9 is weighted toward the future and next generation**.**

Especially, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, specifically known as the *Shema* verse, is arguably the centerpiece of not only the book of Deuteronomy, but of Judaism. In 6:4 Moses utters one of the most important revelations of God's identity. When certain medieval Hebrew scribes copied it, they made two individual letters larger than all the other letters in the verse. These two letters ('ע' and 'ד') together form the Hebrew word עֵד, which means 'testimony' or 'stipulation'. Thus, as medieval readers came to this verse in Hebrew, there was a big visual reminder to them that they were reading the Hebrew Bible's central testimony about God.[4]

Deuteronomy constantly faces us with its plea for obedience: fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands … be careful to obey (6:2–3). The command to 'do' what God says occurs about fifty times in this book. Here, the Lord promised them that their willing response to the word would guarantee his unfailing provision for their varied needs.[5] Therefore, Moses stresses how crucial it is to pass along these rules to the next generation with diligence. He tells the Israelites to

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[2] Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed David G. Firth, vol 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 131-132.

[3] George Athas, *Deuteronomy: One Nation under God*, ed Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 104.

[4] George Athas, *Deuteronomy: One Nation under God*, 108.

[5] Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy: Not by Bread Alone*, ed J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, The Bible Speaks Today (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 95.

discuss them when they sleep, when they wake up, and at home and on the journey. As a reminder, they are also instructed to write them on their gates and doorposts.

Deuteronomy 6:1–9 is set within the framework of Moses' reminder to the Israelites to follow God's instructions and be obedient to Him once they arrive in the land. The passage stresses the duty of parents and teachers to diligently teach the commandments of God to future generations. It underscores the importance of religious education within Jewish tradition and the continuity of faith across generations. Thus, Deuteronomy is Moses' faithful charge to the next generation because he wanted them to live as a God-fearing, God-following people in a new land.

Today, many Korean churches are concerned about properly educating the second generation of Korean Americans. Particularly in the Asian North American Church setting, the departure of children from the church is referred to as "the silent exodus." It is silent in that it is "happening almost unnoticed," and it is an exodus "because the size of the departure [is] massive and the numbers staggering.[6]

An Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Background of the Deuteronomy

In Judaism and in early Christianity the Mosaic authorship of the entire Pentateuch was generally held.[7] In Judaism, too, there were those who raised questions

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[6] Daniel L. Wong, "The Asian North American Experience", in *Finding Our Voice: A Vision for Asian North American Preaching* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 37-38.

[7] J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 56.

about the traditional view from time to time. The book itself purports to be a series of addresses by Moses to Israel at the end of the long wilderness sojourn just before his death. In that context, Moses addresses Israel with a strong covenantal "either/or" made up of assurances and imperatives, for Moses knows that Israel in the new land of promise will have its faith in YHWH severely challenged by seductive alternatives of culture and religion of comparable law codes of the ancient Near East. The similarities and the contrasts are both worthy.[8]

We can infer the purpose of the authors of Deuteronomy with considerable confidence. It was first and foremost to define a pattern of conduct, especially religious conduct, which was regarded as conforming to the terms of the covenant the LORD God had made with Israel. Such conduct required especially single-minded and exclusive allegiance to worship the LORD God alone. No other God was to be set alongside this one deity, nor was any form of image or physical representation of any god, even of the LORD, to be tolerated. In accordance with this purpose, sacrificial worship was to be restricted to one location only, which the LORD God would signify. Sanctuaries, cult objects, and religious practices pertaining to other gods and goddesses were all banned and condemned to be actively destroyed. A particular program of festivals was further defined as appropriate of the worship of the LORD God.[9]

In a postmodern society where, meta-narratives are the norm, claiming a single truth is challenging and requires passion. At the same time, communicating truth in a

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[8] Ronald E. Clements, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, Volume II, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Introduction to Narrative Literature, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998). 269.

[9] Ronald E. Clements, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. 270.

postmodern culture requires a well-crafted strategy. I recognize the struggle that contemporary immigrant churches face in communicating the gospel to the next generation of immigrants. This is like the situation of Moses and the first generation of the Exodus, who had to bring the generations in the wilderness into the Promised Land without them.

Drawing upon Deuteronomy 6:1–9, this project seeks to establish a biblical foundation for the intentional faith formation of the next generation within immigrant church communities. At the same time, this study understands such formation not merely as religious education but as a fundamentally missional task of the covenant community. The people of God are called not only to preserve faith internally but to embody and transmit that faith as participants in God's redemptive mission in the world.

Prerequisites for the Blessed People (6:1-3)

Once they crossed the Jordan, these travelers would soon be immersed in a culture and lifestyle which encouraged belief in a variety of pagan gods. From the start they must understand that the Lord is to be honored as the one and only true God who had an exclusive claim on their worship and allegiance. Unlike their pagan neighbors, they would honor their God best not by the multiplicity of sacrifices they offered but by their reverence for and obedience to him. These twin truths were communicated to the waiting people visually and verbally.[10]

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[10] Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy: Not by Bread Alone*, ed J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, The Bible Speaks Today (England, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 94.

Verse one through three, these three verses are introductory to the next great portion of Moses' address, the "first and great commandment" to love God. This is the commandment, the statutes, and the ordinances—the singular (commandment) may refer to the same principle underlying all the law (though see 5:31), in which case statutes and ordinances are in apposition, describing the general laws based on the first principle.[11]

There are several levels of monotheism that can be identified and that may have characterized the beliefs of various Israelites in various periods. The ultimate monotheism could be called *philosophical monotheism:* there has only ever been one God in existence. *Henotheism* acknowledges the existence of other gods but often insists on the supremacy of one's own god. Similarly, *monolatry* describes a situation where a person or group has determined to worship only one God, regardless of whether other gods, exist or not. Finally, a *practical monotheist* may acknowledge a number of gods, but most of his religious and worship activity is focused on one particular deity. The material in Deuteronomy does not allow for practical monotheism but does allow for henotheism and monolatry at the very least.[12]

Furthermore, the word צוה (command) is It's an integral part of God's relationship with Moses. God gives Moses the Lord's command, and Moses is given the task of communicating it to the community and keeping it. In order of frequency, human subjects of the verb include Moses (86 times; 72 in the Pentateuch, of which 53 are in Deuteronomy; also 10 in Joshua; 2 in 2 Kings; 2 in 1 Chronicles); 14 in Joshua (the

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[11] Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 167.

[12] Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Deut. 6:4.

exclusive subject in this book); David (11 times, 7 in 2 Samuel; 2 in 1 Kings (with one exception, all occurrences are in the accession narrative).[13]

However, the situation in Deuteronomy 6:1-9 assumes that Moses is not in this world. We can see that there is an "opacity" in the validity of the command, as the command is a "past event" that has already been given, and the fulfillment of the command is a future event. The children of Israel experienced the transformation from "slaves in Egypt" to "people of God" overnight, but living up to their new status didn't happen overnight.

Living as God's people required not only taking God's commands, regulations, and laws to heart and keeping them on a personal level but also building a law-based society with their neighbors and passing them on to their children to preserve their national identity as God's people and continue their God-given mission. The use of the word "command" confirms that living as God's people is not optional, but mandatory. It emphasizes that we are to live according to God's will, not according to what we think is right and following a set of rules that we have agreed upon and compromised. This is because the order and norms of our society are established through the consensus of its members, but the standards for living as God's people are given to us by God, not by human agreement.[14]

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[13] F. Garcia-López, "צוה", in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 277.

[14] For a theological discussion of Israel's vocation as a covenant people whose communal life and legal structures embody God's commands and are to be taught diligently to the next generation, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 89–95; and Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 162–168.

The object of Moses' teaching of the law was life-fear (or reverence) of the Lord God; the evidence of this reverence would be seen in the obedience of the Israelites to God's law, and its fruit would be long life. Therefore, the people are commanded to hear (or obey) in order that they might find the full prosperity of life promised by the Lord God of your fathers (v. 3). A land flowing with milk and honey—the phrase occurs a number of times in Deuteronomy (11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20) and describes the richness of the land which the Israelites were soon to possess.[15]

The concept of the one and only God is associated with the exclusivity of Christianity, with Jesus Christ in the New Testament being the only way to salvation. Therefore, we would start by emphasizing the one true God in order to evangelize the next generation of immigrants. This recognition of the one true God prepares the way for the central confession of Deuteronomy 6:4–5, which calls God's people not only to acknowledge His uniqueness but also to love Him with their whole heart, soul, and strength—a devotion that forms the foundation of covenantal faith and its transmission to the next generation.

Hear O Israel: The Fundamental Truth (6:4-5)

Verses 4–9, known in the Jewish tradition as the Shema, contain what have been called "the fundamental truth of Israel's religion" and "the fundamental duty founded upon it."[16] The expression hear here simply means to listen to sounds with your

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[15] Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 168.

[16] Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 168.

biological ears! but rather a command to listen to God's commands and expect an appropriate response to them.

What we need to notice here is how Jehovah God was different from the gods of the ancient Near East at the time. Peter C. Cragie [17] urged the question here is in what sense the pred. "one" is to be understood. Does it express the unity of Jehovah, declaring that He is in His essence indivisible, cannot—like *Baʿal* and *ʿAshtōreth*, for instance, who are often spoken of in the plural number assume different phases or attributes, as presiding over different localities, or different departments of nature, and cannot further be united syncretistically (as was done sometimes by the less spiritual Israelites) with heathen deities; but is only known under the one character by which He has revealed Himself to Israel.[18]

Numerous scholars identify Deuteronomy 6:4-5 as a key passage in the monotheistic faith, specifically the John Van Seters[19] claims that the reform to centralize the worship of *Yahweh* in Jerusalem and to eliminate the cults of all other deities and all other rival cult places set in motion an important theological development in the understanding of the nature of the god Yahweh. The oldest core document of Deuteronomy probably began with the declaration in Deut. 6:4–5, '*Yahweh*, our God is

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[17] [1] Peter C. Craigie (1938–1985) was a Scottish-born Old Testament scholar known especially for his work on Deuteronomy and the Psalms. His commentary *The Book of Deuteronomy* in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament series has been widely recognized for its careful exegesis and theological insight.

[18] S. R. Driver, *A critical and exegetical commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 90.

[19] John Van Seters is a Canadian scholar of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the Ancient Near East. Currently University Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina, he was formerly James A. Gray Professor of Biblical Literature at UNC. He took his Ph.D. at Yale University in Near Eastern Studies (1965) and a Th.D. from the University of Lausanne (1999).

only one *Yahweh*', meaning that there is to be only a single form of Yahweh worship and that the people, 'Israel', are to give absolute loyalty to this one deity. Such a declaration is made from the context and recognition of polytheism, so that it is described as monolatry, the worship of a single deity.[20]

This implies that Israel's God is different from other gods. The implication of this interpretation is to deny the very existence of the gods that other nations believe in. It asserts that other ancient Near Eastern nations believe in their gods, but that God is one regardless of their beliefs. We can see that the emphasis on the one God, *Yahweh*, was an important message for Moses. The emphasis on the One Yahweh is a challenge in itself during the great social currents of postmodernism. But the emphasis on the one and only Yahweh is a concept that should never be left out as we pass on the faith to the next generation. In the same vein, Moses begins his charge to the next generation by emphasizing the one and only God. We have a responsibility to save the next generation from the world's teachings that "anything can be true!"

Van Seters maintains that the emphasis on the one true God reflects a theological orientation that stands in sharp contrast to the nature and practice of idolatry. The law regarding the centralization of worship of the one deity, Yahweh, also enforces the aniconic nature of that worship by suggesting that the temple is not a place where the deity's image is set up or dwells. Rather, *Yahweh* sets up his 'name' or causes his 'name' to reside, as a kind of divine hypostasis. Even the ark with its flanking cherubim, which was understood in the Jerusalem temple tradition as the throne of Yahweh of the

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[20] John Van Seters, *The Pentateuch: A Social-Science Commentary*, Second Edition, The Cornerstones Series (London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury T&T Clark: An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), 89–90.

heavenly hosts, was reduced to the status of container of the tables of the law (10:3–5). The divine presence becomes immanent among *Yahweh*'s people by means of the invocation of his name in the temple liturgy and in the Law as symbolized in the Decalogue, the direct words of the deity and inscribed on the stone tablets, said to reside in the ark.[21]

We can know that through Sester's reason emphasizes that the one and only God is not just another idol but is the "life" that dwells among God's people and is building an authentic relationship with them. Thus, an emphasis on the one true God is an important foundation for faith education for the next generation of immigrants because it gives them true life, not just another set of laws or rules, and it gives them the electricity to come to the Lord in prayer when they are lost and struggling in their faith.

The next verse talks about man's proper behavior toward the one and only God. Our proper behavior toward the one and only God is to 'love' Him. According to Cragie, verse 5 You shall love the Lord your God—this command, based on the statement of the previous verse, is central to the whole book of Deuteronomy Moses also talks about the attitude and mindset of loving God. Moses is telling us to focus on Him, to love Him with all your souls and bodies. But the ability for humans to love God as we know Him was lost in Adam's sin in Genesis.[22] In response, Craigie argues of a love that is grounded in God's preemptive love. Craigie says that 'The injunction to love was based on the

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[21] John Van Seters, *The Pentateuch: A Social-Science Commentary*, 90.

[22] Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 169-171.

precedent of God's love, which had been shown to the Israelites principally in the Exodus, and, in a larger context, in their election and calling from the time of Abraham'[23]

The obedience required of Israel would not have been the kind of obedience that would allow them to act when their rational minds agreed and not to act when they disagreed. Following the proclamation "Hear, O Israel" (v.4), the people of Israel are commanded to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and strength. This command extends beyond intellectual recognition and calls for an undivided covenantal loyalty. In this sense, obedience to God is not grounded primarily in rational evaluation but in a wholehearted devotion that precedes and shapes human understanding.

Craigie also points out the obedient dimension of love. He says that the command to love is central because the whole book is concerned with the renewing of the covenant with God, and although the renewal demanded obedience, that obedience would be possible only when it was a response of love to the God who had brought the people out of Egypt and was leading them into the promised land. The language of love is reminiscent of both treaty language.[24]

Challenge to Instruct Them (6:6–9)

God commands parents to teach their children, because children are not only the children of their parents, but they are also the children of God, and they are God's covenant people.

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[23] Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 169-170.

[24] Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 170.

Therefore, biblical parenting can be summarized as "a curriculum" in which God speaks (commands), and parents communicate those commands to their children. God instructs parents to communicate, and He provides explicit guidance regarding the objectives, subject matter, and approaches of education. The objective of the directive to "teach" is identical to the reason individuals exist in the world. "Why does a human being live?" "Why does a human being live?" According to Deuteronomy 4:10, "To develop a fear of God while residing in the world."[25] Embracing love for the one true God as a dimension of obedience may have been natural to the first generation of the Exodus, but it may be foreign to the so-called wilderness generation.[26] They may have learned of God's existence from their parents in the wilderness and had some idea of how to live their lives as God's people, but they were not parties to a covenant with God.[27]

This situation is similar for the next generation of immigrants. The first generation of Korean immigrants came to the U.S. with the so- called "American Dream." For them, the U.S. was the land of opportunity, the promised land. They also experienced the great revival of Korean Christianity in the 60s and 70s, and they had a passionate faith in God in the U.S. as well.[28]

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[25] Deuteronomy 4:10 ("Assemble the people for me, that they may hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so"). For the purpose of human life as learning to fear God, see Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 64–67.

[26] On the "wilderness generation" as distinct from the Exodus generation in terms of covenant experience, see Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 145–148.

[27] For the covenantal distinction between generations, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 89–91.

[28] Studies of post-1965 Korean immigration note that many newcomers interpreted America as a "promised land" or "land where dreams come true," bringing with them a vibrant Protestant faith shaped by revival movements in Korea and then re-planting it in immigrant congregations across the United States

Eugene H. Merrill[29] discusses the Moses generation's pressing need for education to next generation about God's commandment that an important demand of the covenant relationship was that it be perpetuated beyond the immediate generation of those with whom the Lord made it, for its promises and provisions were for generations yet unborn (4:25, 40; 5:9–10, 29). In practical terms this necessitated a regular routine of instruction. Father must educate son and son the grandson so that the facts and features of the covenant might never be forgotten.[30]

We need to take note of the words of Deuteronomy 30 in this teaching. This is because it is within this context that the next generation will be taught. In Deuteronomy 30:14, God emphasizes that for us to carry out God's commands, we must first internalize them in our hearts. This verse says that the obligation to love God must be ingrained in our hearts. Hans Walter Wolff[31] emphasizes that the concept of "taking it to heart" refers to the act of retaining acquired knowledge (Deut. 30:1; Jer. 17:1; Dan. 7:28), which requires specific values and an internal drive.[32] Here we need to focus on the concept of "heart," which Daniel Issac Block[33] suggests is the words of Deuteronomy 6:5 are a

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[29] Eugene H. Merrill is an American Old Testament scholar who has worked as a distinguished professor of Old Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary and 2010 president of the Evangelical Theological Society.

[30] Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 166–167.

[31] Hans Walter Wolff was a German Protestant theologian. He was professor at the University of Mainz from 1959 to 1967, and from 1967 to 1978 he was Professor of Old Testament at the University of Heidelberg.

[32] Hans Walter Wolff*, Anthropology of the Old Testament*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1974), 48.

[33] Daniel Isaac Block (born 1943) is a Canadian/American Old Testament scholar. He is Gunther H. Knoedler Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Wheaton College. He has worked as a senior translator on the New Living Translation, revised edition with responsibility for the books of Moses.

layered representation of human existence: heart refers to the inner being, including the mind, will refers to all human desires, and strength refers to all human relationships, including the outer. The Hebrew word *lēb* ('heart') often functions metaphorically for the seat of the emotions and will, but equally often it refers to the "mind" or the seat of thought.[34]

The current inquiry is to the methods by which we can cultivate our offspring to embody the covenant people of God. There are multiple approaches to accomplish this objective; nevertheless, the most efficacious approach entails the reinstatement of familial worship and the cultivation of second-generation schooling within the context of the church community.

The current inquiry concerns how we can effectively nurture the next generation to embody their identity as the covenant people of God. While there are various strategies to pursue this goal, one of the most efficacious involves the reinstatement of family worship and the intentional cultivation of second-generation faith formation within the communal life of the church.[35] Family worship remains a traditional Christian practice, but the development of future generations depends on more than just family devotion.

The responsibility of transmitting covenant faith is therefore not limited to the family but extends to the entire faith community. The church becomes the space in which faith is embodied, practiced, and shared across generations. In this sense, the church must understand itself not merely as an institution of religious instruction but as a missional community that participates in God's redemptive work in the world.

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[34] Daniel I Block, *Deuteronomy,* The NIV Application Commentary: ed Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 2012), 182.

[35] Joel R. Beeke, *Family Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2002), 7–10.

As Seok-Jae Jeon[36] explains, the essence of the church is fundamentally missional; the church is called to move outward into society and engage people relationally rather than merely inviting them into institutional structures. The form of the church must therefore harmonize with the culture, language, and everyday life of the community it seeks to serve.[37] Within such a missional understanding of the church, the formation of the next generation is not simply an educational task but a participation in God's ongoing mission through the covenant community.

The entire church community must actively join in the discipleship of its youth. The church's collective involvement in this calling transforms private devotion into a shared communal effort which unites worship with teaching and mentorship and life together across generations.[38]

To this end, the church must intentionally construct formative spaces where faith is not merely taught but experienced, practiced, and embodied within relationships. Intergenerational worship, shared storytelling, and participatory practices allow younger members to witness faith lived out through the lives of older believers, while also granting them meaningful roles within the community.[39] Such shared participation cultivates spiritual memory, strengthens communal identity, and nurtures a sense of

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[36] Seok-Jae Jeon is a professor at Seoul Theological University in South Korea and a leading scholar in the field of next-generation ministry and missional ecclesiology, particularly focusing on the engagement of younger generations within the contemporary church.

[37] Seok-Jae Jeon, *"Z-Generation and the Missional Community*," Bridge Community: A Webzine for Community Ministry 51 (March 2026): 199–200.

[38] Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 49–78.

[39] Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 1–24.

covenantal belonging within the faith community. Furthermore, structured mentorship and small-group discipleship create relational environments in which questions, doubts, and spiritual struggles can be addressed with pastoral care and theological reflection. When the church functions as an integrated network of spiritual formation rather than merely a collection of isolated programs, faith is transmitted not only through formal instruction but also through shared life and lived practice. In this way, the next generation is formed not as passive recipients of inherited tradition but as active participants in the continuing story of God's covenant people.

The church community serves as the divinely designed and optimal environment for discipleship.[40] It is within this relational and covenantal structure that formation becomes most enduring. In the context of second-generation immigrant youth, there is a unique and promising opportunity. These youth tend to be highly engaged, culturally adaptive, and open to conversations about spirituality, particularly when such dialogue occurs in formats that feel relevant to their world.[41]

The youth of today demonstrate a strong preference for interactive visual experiences which also involve participation. The second-generation immigrant youth struggle to participate in traditional lecture-based spiritual formation because they have grown up in a digital world with social media and an evolving visual environment. The youth group shows better engagement when learning takes place in environments that foster emotional connections and active participation and creative self-expression.

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[40] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1954), 23–25.

[41] Melvin K. Kimble, *Faith Development and Fowler* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1995), 88–90.

The worship practice of drama worship shows great potential as an alternative approach. Through this space youth participants can transition from hearing passively to becoming direct participants in the biblical narrative. Through physical embodiment of biblical characters and cultural reinterpretation of gospel stories they experience faith through physical engagement and relational and imaginative practices. The method matches their developmental requirements and cultural background by providing worship that both forms and holds deep meaning. Through drama worship young people can experience theological truth in a concrete way while their various approaches to identity and story and belonging receive validation. Through this practice they receive an invitation to join God's redemption story as active participants who receive their shape from both the Word and community.

Continuation: Youth as Missional Beings

A natural extension of covenantal formation within the church community is the understanding of the youth not only as recipients of faith but as missional agents within God's redemptive narrative. When the next generation embodies covenant identity through worship, discipleship, and creative participation, they also become witnesses to the transforming reality of the gospel in their immediate societies. In this sense, the youth are not merely the "future" of the church but the missional present through whom God's purposes are continually enacted.

As Kenda Creasy Dean[42] emphasizes, adolescent faith formation finds its fullest expression when young believers see themselves as participants in God's mission, not just observers of the church's tradition.[43] Through forms of embodied worship such as drama and other participatory practices, youth encounter Scripture as a living story and are equipped to re-present that story within their cultural and relational contexts.[44] This performative engagement is particularly meaningful for second-generation immigrant youth who live between cultural identities.

Their bicultural experiences uniquely position them to become bridge-builders—interpreters of faith who communicate the gospel across cultural and generational divides.[45]

When the church views youth as partners in mission rather than passive learners, discipleship deepens into missional belonging. Such belonging takes root in relational spaces where young believers learn that faith is not confined to personal devotion but extends toward the neighbor, the community, and the world. The covenant God who once called Israel to embody His holiness among the nations continues to call the church's youth to become living testimonies of His kingdom in their schools, social networks, and

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[42] Kenda Creasy Dean, PhD, an ordained United Methodist pastor in the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference, is the Mary D. Synnott Professor of Youth, Church, and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary. In addition to teaching in practical theology, education and formation (specifically youth and young adult ministry, the church as social innovator, and theories of teaching), Dean works closely with Princeton's Institute for Youth Ministry and the Farminary.

[43]Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 58–60.

[44] Mark Senter III, *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 213.

[45] Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 141–143.

digital spaces. By empowering the next generation to engage missionally, the church fulfills the biblical pattern of Deuteronomy 6:6–9 — transmitting not only the knowledge of God but also His redemptive purpose through embodied obedience.

This emphasis on embodied participation in faith formation invites the exploration of creative and experiential approaches to ministry that engage the whole person. One such approach that has gained attention in both educational and therapeutic contexts is drama therapy. Drama therapy is the use of improvisation, role play, mime, music and movement, stories, masks and rituals, puppet theater, theater play and scripted drama as a therapeutic vehicle. It constructs faith, increases self-consciousness, relaxes, increases responsibility and functions on a variety of levels, such as: physical, emotional, imaginative, and social. It represents the marriage between theater and therapy, but it's not a simple mixture between the two disciplines. It's, more likely, a combination which produces a third mean, distinctive, to help people, using adequate elements for each to encourage growth and development. Unlike a lot of traditional therapies which have a more cerebral approach, in this one the story, theater and physical interpretation of themes are highlighted.[46]

In this way, formative practices such as family worship, intergenerational community, and drama-based worship converge toward the same telos: shaping a people whose internalized faith overflows naturally into witness. The covenant relationship that once required remembrance now finds renewal in action. The youth, formed in heart,

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[46]Paula Crimmens, *Drama therapy and storymaking in Special Education* (London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006), 80.

mind, and strength, live as narrative bearers of God's covenantal love, carrying forward the mission that defines their identity as the people of God.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Exodus, when Israel stood on the threshold of covenant identity, Moses recognized that the greatest challenge before God's people was not merely survival in the wilderness but the preservation of faith across generations. Having witnessed God's mighty acts of deliverance, Moses understood that the memory of redemption could fade if not intentionally embodied and transmitted. Thus, even before entering the Promised Land, the question of the next generation became a central theological and pastoral concern. Deuteronomy presents Moses not only as a lawgiver but as a spiritual shepherd burdened with the task of ensuring that Israel's children would know, love, and faithfully follow the Lord. The continuity of covenant faith depended not on miraculous events alone but on deliberate remembrance, embodied practice, and faithful teaching within the rhythms of daily life.

God shows deep love toward his people while planning to grant them blessings, but this gift depends on their constant devotion to Him. Many present-day parents need to revisit the principles which appear in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The modern world emphasizes teaching our children about biblical principles at the forefront of all education. The research examined the profound message which Moses transmitted to the people who were starting their journey toward the Promised Land. Moses immediately declares his complete devotion to the Lord your God which includes the full commitment of your heart soul and physical strength.

The church, by its very nature, is a missional community called to embody and transmit the gospel across generations. Therefore, the task of forming the next generation is not merely an educational program but an essential expression of the church's identity and participation in God's mission.

Many immigrant churches especially those with Korean communities in the United States now encounter the same Moses-like dilemma regarding the transmission of genuine authentic faith to children who possess a unique cultural background. Children of the first-generation experience faith transmission through cultural practices instead of developing a living relationship with God. At this moment Deuteronomy 6 teaches that spiritual inheritance requires deliberate nurturing to live through embodiment and intentional communication.

The future success of immigrant churches depends on creating faithful future generations instead of maintaining institutional structures. The process of spiritual formation should start in the heart before it spreads to homes and becomes a part of community life. Through creative embodied practices such as drama worship people gain powerful chances to develop their faith. Through active participation in the biblical story youth discover God in ways that connect to their personal life experiences and cultural background. Through drama worship the commandments of God become written on hearts through instruction along with imagination and action and relational reflection.

The church, by its very nature, is a missional community called to embody and transmit the gospel across generations. Therefore, the task of forming the next generation

is not merely an educational program but an essential expression of the church's identity and participation in God's mission.[47]

This missional identity of the church therefore calls for intentional practices through which faith is embodied, modeled, and transmitted within the life of the community.

We should not fear retreating, but we must rise to teach while embodying and modeling our complete devotion to love the Lord our God for their benefit as well as God's honor. The journey toward making this love permanent and visible across generations might depend on participatory worship which is both contextual and incarnational.

Application to Joy Korean Church.

Deuteronomy 6:1–9 presents a vivid vision for faith formation—one that is holistic, relational, and persistent. The passage emphasizes not just the transmission of doctrinal content, but the cultivation of a lifestyle rooted in love for the one true God. Within the immigrant church, particularly among Korean American communities, this call to faithful teaching takes on a pressing urgency. The next generation stands at the intersection of multiple cultures and value systems. Many are fluent in the language of postmodernity, but distant from the language of Scripture. They are immersed in a digital world of competing truths but often estranged from the biblical narrative that once shaped

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[47] [1] On the church as a missional community whose very identity is bound to God's sending work, see Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 1–18; and Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 31–52.

their parents' lives. For this reason, it is essential that churches do more than teach propositional truth; they must embody it in ways that are relationally meaningful and imaginatively compelling.

One such approach is the implementation of a six-week drama worship series, intentionally designed to align with the theological and pedagogical themes of Deuteronomy 6. This initiative invites youth not merely to learn about God, but to encounter Him through the retelling and dramatization of His Word. Each week, students engage with a specific biblical narrative that connects to covenantal themes—creation, fall, promise, deliverance, obedience, and hope. Rather than being passive recipients, they are invited to become participants—writing scripts, embodying characters, constructing props, and collaborating with peers to tell God's story. This multisensory and participatory learning environment allows them to internalize biblical truths in ways that are formative, memorable, and deeply personal.

Drama worship transforms teaching into encounters. It provides space for emotions, questions, struggles, and hopes to be expressed within the framework of faith. In rehearsal, youth wrestle with the motivations of biblical figures; in performance, they publicly proclaim the narrative of redemption; in reflection, they consider how that story intersects with their own lives. Each week includes small group debriefing sessions, in which adult mentors guide students in theological reflection and personal application. Journaling exercises and prayerful engagement complement the dramatic process, allowing for quiet spaces of inner growth amid the communal act of storytelling.

Such a program does not replace traditional teaching; it enhances it by rooting doctrine in experience and memory. Just as Deuteronomy instructs Israel to speak of

God’s commands “when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up,” drama worship integrates faith into the rhythm of everyday life. It is not confined to the pulpit or the classroom but woven into the expressive and communal spaces where youth naturally dwell.

Within the context of Joy Korean Church, this six-week program can serve as both a bridge and a foundation. It bridges the cultural gap between generations, allowing youth to honor their heritage while making faith their own. It also lays a foundation for lifelong discipleship by inviting them to see themselves not merely as church attendees but as active members of God's covenant people. Through this process, the church is not only teaching about God but also raising up a generation that loves Him with heart, soul, and strength, and knows how to embody that love with creativity, conviction, and joy.

At the same time, such formation reflects the deeper identity of the church as a missional community. A missional church understands itself not simply as an institution that preserves religious tradition but as a community sent by God to participate in His redemptive work in the world. Within this framework, the formation of the next generation becomes central to the church’s mission. As young believers learn to embody the story of God through worship, participation, and shared life, they are gradually formed not only as disciples but also as witnesses who carry the gospel into their everyday contexts.

In a world where faith often becomes privatized or abstract, drama worship restores its communal and embodied dimensions. It provides a living response to the questions raised in Deuteronomy 6: How will our children know the Lord? How will they remember His mighty acts? How will they live as His people? The answer lies not in

information alone but in formation—a formation that engages the whole person, the whole family, and the whole community in the joyful and sacred task of remembering, retelling, and rejoicing in the God who calls us His own. In this way, the church fulfills its missional calling by forming a generation that not only inherits the faith but also actively participates in God's ongoing mission in the world.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Throughout this chapter, I will address the importance of cultural understanding and access in youth ministry. Furthermore, I will attempt to incorporate the element of drama into worship. Utilizing a theatrical performance as a means of religious devotion might offer significant benefits to young individuals in many fundamental manners.

Primarily, it offers a medium for artistic representation that directly resonates with the emotions and thoughts of young people. Theater provides a distinct opportunity for young people to examine and interact with religious themes and tales, because of its combination of storytelling, character development, and emotional impact. Contrary to conventional modes of worship that largely depend on sermons or hymns, a play offers a more engaging and participatory experience. It involves participants in the unfolding story and encourages them to actively engage in the discovery of faith.

It is noteworthy that there is a considerable historical basis to the use of theater as a tool for church worship. It seems sense that the Bible would be utilized for worship and evangelism, which is why we refer to it as the narrative part of the Bible. The Bible is full of stories.

There is widespread acceptance that the first great age of formal theatre, the fifth century BCE in Greece, derived from the ritual worship of Greek gods, especially the god Dionysus. Some scholars believe this connection is textual, that Greek drama developed from dithyrambs, choral odes to the gods. The English word "tragedy" comes from the Greek '*tragoida*', which is literally translated "goat song." (The Greeks sacrificed goats in their worship of Dionysus).[1]

Charles Wesley, A. M., was the best Christian poet; in reference to hymnology, that has flourished in either ancient or modern times. The hymns used in the religious services of the Methodists were composed principally by him; and such a collection exists not among any other people. Most collections among other sects of Christians are indebted to his compositions for some of their principal excellencies.[2]

The importance of a cultural approach to missions has been emphasized repeatedly, especially for the youth ministry or reaching the next generation. To know the language of the next generation, the lives of the next generation, and to reach them, we will need to use the code of culture to our advantage. I want to carefully present solutions for evangelizing the next generation through a cultural approach, revisiting one historical figure and grafting on what we can take from his work today. 'Methodism was born of praise'[3] is the preface to the English Methodist Hymnal. England had already had the

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[1]Todd E. Johnson, Dale Savidge, Robert Johnston, Robert Smyth & William Dyrness. *Performing the sacred (engaging culture): theology and theatre in dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 32.

[2] Adam Clarke, Samuel Dunn, *Christian Theology*, Second Edition (London, UK; Glasgow; Dublin: Thomas Tegg & Son; R. Griffin & Co.; Tegg, Wise, & Co., 1835), 282.

[3] David Rumsey, "The Three Doctrines of the 1933 Methodist Hymn Book," *The Sum of our Choices, Essays in Honour of Eric J. Sharpe* (Sydney, AU: The University of Sydney, 1994), 3.

Bible translated into the vernacular in the 16th century, but the illiteracy rate was very high.[4]

Charles's hymns were an excellent means of communicating the gospel to the most vulnerable members of society, much in the same way that painted icons were used in the early church, or stained glass was used by churches in the Middle Ages to tell the stories of the Bible to illiterate people. Hymns are also tuneful prayers, and Charles used hymnody to encourage people who didn't know how to pray to pray by singing hymns to those who didn't know how to pray This function of hymns was well-suited to the Methodist revival, so Methodist spirituality is characterized by poetry.

All Christians express their spirituality with certain cultural and personal colors. This characteristic indicates individuality in the process of spiritual expression.[5] Adrian van Kaam[6], who studied formative spirituality, explained that the human being who seeks spiritual formation attempts a formative struggle with the transcendent potential, which is expressed by the struggling human being in songs, love poems, and prayers.[7]

Charles Wesley was a world-renowned hymn writer and pioneer of the Methodist revival in 18th-century England. His spiritual journey throughout his life and the nearly 9,000 hymns he wrote still resonate and spiritually challenge many. Charles was educated

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[4] Yongyong Kim, "A Study of the Church Reformation in Sixteenth Century England and Thomas Cranmer's Worship Reforms" (Seoul, South Korea: Theology and Practice, 2020), 22.

[5] Adrian Van Kaam, Fundamental Formation, *Formative Spirituality,* Volume one (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1983), 31.

[6] Adrian van Kaam, C.S.Sp. (April 19, 1920 – November 17, 2007) was a Dutch Catholic priest in the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, a college professor, existentialist psychologist, writer on formative spirituality, and founder of the Institute of Formative Spirituality at Duquesne University and its successor, the Epiphany Association of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States.

[7] Adrian Van Kaam, *Formative Spirituality,* 4.

in the best of neoclassical orthodox literature, and he used his literary assets to carve out his own distinctive field of hymnody, one that was hard to match in the Romantic era.[8]

However, we have relatively focused on John Wesley rather than Charles Wesley when discussing English Christian spirituality or the formation of Methodist theology. Yet Charles Wesley's cultural power was as influential as John Wesley's on English Christian spirituality.

Charles is known for the quantity and quality of his hymns and many of them are still sung, Sunday by Sunday, in churches of all denominations. As a hymn-writer he can hardly be too highly esteemed. However, Charles Wesley was much more than a poet[9]

This paper will examine the historical impact of Charles Wesley, the importance of his cultural contributions, and how they developed the Christian faith in England and influenced believers. The paper will also describe the importance of a cultural approach to faith growth for Korean youth groups in the U.S. through these historical sources.

Respect for Culture Leads to Soul Salvation

Charles honed his skills at Westminster School, where he studied Latin and torture, and one of the hallmarks of the school was the strict adherence of students to speaking in Latin. This lifestyle gave Charles the opportunity to excel in classical Latin studies. At the age of thirteen, Charles was selected as a royal scholar, and the special

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[8] Jeong-Min Kim, *The Hymns and Spirituality of Charles Wesley* (Seoul, South Korea: Korean Association of Christian Studies, 2022), 126.

[9] Arnold A. Dallimore, *A Heart Set Free: The Life of Charles Wesley* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1988), 7.

training that scholars received allowed him to study Latin, Greek, and other classics in depth.[10]

Charles Wesley entered Oxford University in 1726 at the age of nineteen. During his years at Westminster, he had been under the watchful eye of his brother, Samuel. But now he was free from this oversight, and around him there lay many moral dangers. These were the days when the standards of the nation had been grievously lowered. Drunkenness, gambling, stealing and immorality were common, and Deism—the belief that God is merely an impersonal 'First Cause'—was widely accepted. In later years Charles described the university as a place where learning keeps its loftiest seat, and hell its firmest throne'.[11] In effect, the Westminster experience and the Oxford experience meant two worlds colliding with Charles. It is also like the environment our church's youth currently find themselves in.

This was John Wesley's position when his younger brother came to Oxford. Charles was eager to enjoy his liberty, and anxious to take his fill of university pleasures. He lost the first twelve months at college in "diversions." His brother says, "If I spoke to him about religion, he would warmly answer, 'What, would you have me to be a saint all at once?' and would hear no more."[12]

Charles Wesley was not content with seeking his own spiritual blessing; he believed that Christian faith must be lived out in fellowship and social religion. In May 1729, Charles wrote to his brother, John Wesley, describing a meaningful instance from

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[10] John Telford, *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley* (London, UK: Wesleyan Methodist Book, 1900), 23.

[11] Arnold A. Dallimore, *A Heart Set Free: The Life of Charles Wesley*, 33.

[12] John Telford, *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, 33.

his ministry. He reported that a modest and well-disposed young man who lived next door had fallen under the influence of harmful companions. Although the young man desired to pursue a religious life, he struggled to separate himself from his worldly associations. Charles Wesley encouraged him to break away from these influences and actively helped him maintain distance from those companions. At first, the young man hesitated to receive Holy Communion more frequently than the customary times for fear of ridicule from others. However, Charles Wesley helped him overcome this fear, and eventually the two began to attend Communion together every week.[13] This episode illustrates the Methodist conviction that holiness is nurtured within accountable Christian fellowship rather than in isolation.

Charles was not unaware of the world, but he never lost the clarity of the gospel of Jesus Christ during it, and his passion for the salvation of souls led to his evangelistic ministry. We can think of it as an example of understanding, not contempt, of culture leading to the salvation of souls.

Charles Wesley's hymns in cultural context

One of the hallmarks of eighteenth-century English society was its love of music. Large mansions had large rooms for musical recitals, and the aristocracy owned or hired their own musicians. They often had music played at meals, lectures, and parties, and considered it a point of pride. The music of the aristocracy surprisingly reached the illiterate classes, who often despised the aristocracy.[14]

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[13] John Telford, *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, 35.

[14] J. H. Whiteley, *Wesley's England* (London, UK: Epworth Press, 1938), 88-90.

In this cultural climate, Charles Wesley's hymns were written on a neoclassical foundation. The century in which he was born, raised, and educated was the height of neoclassicism. Neo-classicism is a term coined by modern literary scholars to distinguish the classicism of ancient Greece and Rome from the classicism of the literary revival.[15]

The neoclassical period in which Charles lived coincided with the Romantic period in England, so an understanding of Romanticism (1740-1820) is necessary to understand Charles's hymns. This was the period when Charles Wesley began to create hymns in earnest after his conversion, preaching the gospel. Romantic literature was characterized by an emphasis on loyalty to national concepts of idealism and loyalty to nature, along with a focus on the lives of the common people and the marginalized.[16] These characteristics are easily found throughout Charles' hymns.

As a result, Charles was trained in the neoclassical orthodoxy of the best educational institutions of his day, and with those literary assets, he pioneered his own unique genre of hymnody, which was unrivaled in the Romantic movement.[17] Through his hard work and divine inspiration, he expressed all the spirituality that God had shaped in his life in hymns, and Christian spirituality gradually permeated the lives of those who sang the truths of Christianity through hymns. In the Methodist revival in England in the eighteenth century, hymnody was an important means of teaching the saints about their

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[15] Sik-heon Jeong, *The Neoclassical Theory of English Poetry* (Seoul, SK: Shinasa, 2005), 13.

[16] Yup Kang, *Romanticism and Poetry Collection* (Seoul, SK: Shinasa, 2002), 39-41.

[17] Charles Wesley received a rigorous classical education at Westminster School and Christ Church, Oxford, where he studied Greek and Latin poets and developed the literary and metrical skills that later shaped his hymn writing. His thousands of hymns—marked by dense scriptural allusion, doctrinal depth, and poetic sophistication—have been recognized as some of the finest in the English language and exerted wide influence on later Protestant hymnody and devotional literature.

faith, the Bible, and catechesis. Through congregational singing, theological truths were not merely taught but internalized within the hearts and memories of ordinary believers. In this way, Charles Wesley's hymns functioned as a powerful instrument of spiritual formation, shaping both the devotional life and the communal identity of the early Methodist movement.

Charles Wesley's life as a Missionary

We know Charles Wesley as a lyricist who wrote hymns, but he also had a notable career as a missionary. As a believer in Jesus Christ and as a minister of the gospel, mission is not only an identity, it's a mission, so we can't overlook that his hymn writing was also done in a missionary context.

The colony of Georgia had been founded in 1732 under the leadership of a Parliamentarian, Colonel James Oglethorpe. Having headed a commission concerning conditions in England's prisons Oglethorpe realized that there were hundreds of people rotting away their lives in debtors' prisons and he determined it would be better to give them an opportunity to make a new life for themselves by emigrating to America. Moreover, during those years numerous people in Europe were suffering papal persecution and Oglethorpe intended to offer them too the opportunity of a new start in the transatlantic colony.[18]

John and Charles, the brothers sailed on the *Simmonds* on 22 October 1735. With them two friends sailed: Benjamin Ingham, who had been a member of the Holy Club, and Charles Delamotte, the son of a wealthy London sugar merchant. The vessel put in

[18] Arnold A. Dallimore, *A Heart Set Free: The Life of Charles Wesley*, 43.

for a few days at Cowes on the Isle of Wight, an island on the south coast of England. The four men went ashore, and Charles preached for the first time, entirely reading his sermon, as was the custom of most clergymen at that time.[19] The brothers were drawn to this work by its very hardships. So far as comfort and advancement was concerned, they had everything to lose by leaving Oxford, but they were determined to work out their own salvation. For this the mission to Georgia seemed to offer many opportunities. Benjamin Ingham, a devoted young Yorkshireman, who had been one of the Oxford Methodists, went with them[20]

On board the ship bound for Georgia, John and Charles are deeply inspired by Moravians. The voyage was very rough. Three or four heavy storms burst upon the vessel, and sometimes the passengers were in great peril. But amid all the howling of the tempest, and even when the sea broke over the vessel as though it would swallow it up, the Moravians sang on unmoved. The contrast between them and the screaming English passengers taught the brothers to admire the sublime trust in God of the pious Germans.[21]

"Are you not afraid?" Charles Wesley asked, 'Thank God, we are not afraid,' the Moravians replied. 'Then are your children and wives not afraid?' Wesle asked, and with great meekness, the Moravians replied," Our children and wives are not afraid. "Our children and wives are not afraid of death." This calmness, which is impossible without absolute trust in God in the face of terrifying storms, shocks the Wesleys, shocking them for their unbelief. After arriving in America, these spiritual leaders of England and

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[19] Arnold A. Dallimore, *A Heart Set Free: The Life of Charles Wesley*, 45.

[20] John Telford, *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, 45.

[21] John Telford, *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, 46–47.

America invite the Moravian brothers to share a deep fellowship of faith. After this event, Charles Wesley, a spiritual giant, wrote the greatest hymn in Protestant history. It's the hymn we know so well, Hymn 388, “In the Time of Rain and Storm and Rising Tide.” The lyrics in verse 2 describe Wesley’s terrifying experience with the storm and his confession of his unbelief.[22]

However, in overall, Charles’s missionary work was not a success; his failures stemmed from his attempts to apply his own methods to the mission field.

The brothers Wesley and their two associates began living by rule. Each evening, they planned their duties for the following day and the time to be given to each activity. They got up at four in the morning and devoted the first hour to private prayer. Then for two hours the four met together to read the Bible and study certain of the church fathers. They had breakfast and then assembled all the passengers who were willing to come for public prayers. From nine o’clock till twelve John Wesley studied German, Charles wrote sermons, Delamotte read Greek and Ingham taught the children. During the afternoon the four of them went among the people, warning those they felt particularly needed it and seeking to establish a witness for righteousness.[23]

Of course, the question arises, why had Charles Wesley failed so seriously in his first attempts to perform the work of the ministry. Undoubtedly, he was basically too much of an autocrat and people rejected his efforts to set rules for their lives. It is also true that because of his intense and poetic nature he had proved exceptionally sensitive to the attitudes and the opposition of men and women around him. But, above all, he was

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[22] John Telford, *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, 49.

[23] Arnold A. Dallimore, *A Heart Set Free: The Life of Charles Wesley*, 45.

not yet converted. His only message at this time was one of works, and he was still unaware of the great, fundamental truth that he was soon to experience, and that he would thereafter declare to the multitude—the truth of 'justification by faith'![24]

Less than a year and Charles was back in Georgia in 1736 putting an end to his missionary efforts in America. It had nothing to do with lack of commitment or hard work on his part; he simply could not adjust to the cultural, social, and political conditions of the people he was sent to. However, this experience in its turn influenced his further work within the Methodist movement, where he was one of the key influencers of Protestant worship – through his hymns. The failure in Georgia was a valuable lesson on the question of cultural adaptation in missionary work and the need to consider the local population when preaching the Word.

Cultural Ministry: Charles Wesley's Hymnody and Spiritual Formation

The year 1738 was the most eventful and remarkable turning point for Wesleys and their insight into God, including his understanding of the means of grace and the clarification of salvation which came with the organization of the band meeting. There were several events.[25]

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[24] Arnold A. Dallimore, *A Heart Set Free: The Life of Charles Wesley*, 51.

[25] John and Charles Wesley both experienced assurance of salvation in May 1738, and in the same year John Wesley began to organize the band societies that became a key "means of grace" in early Methodism. For discussion of 1738 as a decisive turning point and the place of the band meeting in Wesley's understanding of grace and discipleship, see Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 71–88; and Kevin M. Watson, *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience* (Wilmore, KY: Seedbed, 2014), 23–34.

First, Wesleys returned to London from his missionary trip to Georgia spiritually uncertain. John Wesley described this in his journal entry of January 24, 1738, as his ship neared England on the return voyage,

> I went to America to convert the Indians; but O! Who shall convert me? Who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay and believe myself, while no danger is near: But let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Not can I say, 'To die is gain'![26]

Second, brothers Wesley met Peter Böhler, a Moravian, on February 7, 1738, around the time he returned to England. Wesley noted that day as "a day much to be remembered."[27] Knowing Böhler connected Wesley to a meeting of the Fetter Lane Society that Böhler led in London. Kevin M.Watson insists that "the deep influence of the Fetter Lane Society on Wesley's concept of the bands can be seen in a comparison of the beginning of the Fetter Lane Rules with Wesley's *Rules of the Band Societies*"[28] Wesley's journal on May 1, 1738, which lists the Fetter Lane Rules, begins:

> This evening our little society began, which afterwards met in Fetter Lane. Our fundamental rules were as follows: In obedience to the command of God by St. James [See first rule, which paraphrases Jas. 5:16- "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."], and by the advice of Peter Böhler, it was agreed by us …[29]

Charles and John were in almost daily contact with Böhler, and the relationship proved beneficial for them. Recognizing Charles's extraordinary earnestness, Böhler

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[26] Robert Marshall, "*Spiritual Renovation through Accountability: A Contemporary Look at John Wesley's Class Meeting and His Admonition to Watch Over One Another in Love,*" (D.Min. Thesis, George Fox University, 2006), 63.

[27] Wesley, "February 7, 1738," *Works*, Vol. 18, 223.

[28] Kevin M Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness: The Band Meeting in Wesley's Thought and Popular Methodist Practice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 77.

[29] Wesley, "May 1, 1738," *Works*, vol. 18, 235-237.

once asked him, "Do you hope to be saved?" Charles replied, "I do." Böhler then asked, "For what reason do you hope it?" Charles answered, "Because I have used my best endeavors to serve God." According to Charles's own account, "He shook his head and said no more. I thought him very uncharitable, saying in my heart, 'What! Are my endeavors sufficient ground of hope? Would he rob me of my endeavors? I have nothing else to trust to.'"[30]

There now began for the brothers Wesley a search for this faith, which they knew they needed and of which they had been informed by Böhler. Yet 'faith' had become in their thinking a sort of entity on its own and they were virtually seeking 'faith' and 'an experience' rather than seeking Christ. This concept was to color their theology and ministries for much of the rest of their lives.[31]

It was also around this time that Charles Wesley's spiritual journey took a radical turn. He developed a desire to know for certain the substance of his faith. Although he had been engaged in religious activities and missionary work, he found himself unable to grasp the biblical doctrine of salvation by faith. The writings of Martin Luther and the stories of other believers' faith journeys invite him into the experience of grace.[32]

For a few hours in the evening, Charles deluded himself with Martin Luther's commentary, especially the second chapter's conclusion which made an indelible mark on him. The audio tracks of Luther's words really made an impact and reinforced the

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[30] Arnold A. Dallimore*, A Heart Set Free: The Life of Charles Wesley*, 58–59.

[31] Arnold A. Dallimore, *A Heart Set Free: The Life of Charles Wesley*, 59.

[32] Accounts of Charles Wesley's crisis and awakening describe how, in May 1738, after years of religious effort and missionary service, he struggled to understand justification by faith until reading Martin Luther and hearing the testimonies of other believers led him to a personal assurance of God's grace.

notion that laborious works do not grant salvation because Christ took care of our redemption through his death. This is his perspective on this exceptional and advantageous encounter,

> Charles went on to report, I spent some hours this evening with Martin Luther, who was greatly blessed to me, especially his conclusion of the second chapter. I labored, waited, and prayed to feel "who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*".[33]

The writings of this great man inspired Charles to desire to understand the truth of Galatians 2:20 – "who loved me and gave himself for me". The united desire for assurance kept growing because of an extraordinary testimony he heard at the house of a man named Bray. A woman there confidently declared that she had received faith, possessing perfect peace and loving Christ above all else. Charles asked her if she were afraid of dying and she replied without the least doubt that her sins were all wiped out and that Jesus had died to save her. Her confidence was completely the opposite of Charles's feelings for himself; this made Charles more eager to experience the same confidence. As they prayed together for saving faith, Charles was so melted and overpowered that he was persuaded it was God's he should go to Bray's house. [34]

Two days later he said, 'I began an hymn upon my conversion.' It may have been at this time that he wrote the hymn that begins,

> Where shall my wondering soul begin?
> How shall I all to heaven aspire?
> A slave redeemed from death and sin,
> A brand plucked from eternal fire,
> How shall I equal triumphs raise,
> Or sing my great Deliverer's praise?[35]

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[33] Arnold A. Dallimore, *A Heart Set Free: The Life of Charles Wesley,* 60.

[34] John Telford, *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley*,70.

[35] Arnold A. Dallimore, *A Heart Set Free: The Life of Charles Wesley*, 61–62.

In this way, Charles's conversion was not merely a theological realization, but a deeply personal and transformative encounter that overflowed into worship, becoming the very source and substance of his hymnody.

Hymnody as Experiential Evangelical Spirituality

Charles's spirituality of hymnody is an experimental, practical, experiential, and evangelical spirituality of faith that works in love. In order to express the love and truth of Christ as he experienced it firsthand, with the heart of Christ's love, he would think of the souls who would sing his hymns, choose a hymn form that would suit them, and carefully choose words that captured the truth of the gospel, while also considering the pronunciation of the words, syllables, stress, alliteration, and alliteration of the preceding and following words. It is no exaggeration to say that Charles's spirituality is reflected in each and every one of his 9,000 hymns.[36]

One of the quintessential of Methodist doctrine, Rattenbury said, is that God's love is universal, and that Christ is the true friend of every weak sinner.[37] Charles firmly believed that all people, not just himself, could be converted and experience the joy and happiness of salvation. After his conversion, he visited several prisons and preached the gospel to the worst inmates, including those on death row. As they experienced God's grace and accepted Jesus Christ, they became more convinced of God's universal power

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[36] For analyses of Charles Wesley's experimental and evangelical spirituality as it is embodied in the form, language, and pastoral intention of his hymns, see for example S. T. Kimbrough Jr., *The Lyrical Theology of Charles Wesley: A Reader* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011); and John R. Tyson, *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

[37] Rattenbury*, The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns*, 39.

and grace in salvation. Thus, Charles's spirituality was not formed merely on an intellectual level but was experienced through the various means of grace that he came to practice under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This spirituality was expressed through his hymnody.

Embodied Grace and Communal Formation

Charles's hymnal spirituality is a singing spirituality shaped by humility and grace. There are many aspects of Christian doctrine and faith that are difficult to understand intellectually for those without theological training, or even for theologians. This is especially true of mystical matters such as the Trinity, the incarnation and resurrection of Christ. It's not easy to impose belief in these things unilaterally and coercively. That said, not all of Charles's hymns were in line with the catechesis of the Methodist community. In fact, there were hymns in A Collection of Hymns, which Charles published independently in 1749, that John Wesley objected to because of Charles's views and expressions of mysticism. However, in the preface to A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists (1780), John declared that Charles's hymns were appropriate for Methodist catechesis.[38]

Rather than categorizing the 525 hymns according to theological theme or church history, Brother Wesley categorized them into hymns for sinners, penitents, believers, and congregations, so that each believer could find and sing a hymn that suited his or her

[38] Jeong-Min Kim, *The Hymns and Spirituality of Charles Wesley*, 252.

needs, allowing for self-reflection and experience of grace as well as self-study of Methodist doctrine.[39]

In this way, rather than explaining or explaining why complex and esoteric doctrines or biblical stories were the way they were, Charles expressed in his hymns the grace that God had revealed to him. As the public sang Charles's hymns, their spirituality was shaped by their experience of God's grace poured out in their own circumstances. They experienced God personally and restored a deep loving relationship with God. These qualities prove that singing hymns can be a very effective spiritual discipline.

Example: Cultural Ministry in United States

In designing a new worship format for youth, I have been particularly influenced by the example of Willow Creek Community Church, which from its earliest days intentionally shaped its services around the needs and experiences of newcomers and the unchurched. Just as Bill Hybels and the founding team surveyed their community and discovered that many people were open to God but resistant to traditional church forms, today's youth similarly need fresh worship expressions that take seriously their cultural context, questions, and spiritual hunger.[1] In this sense, my concern for second-generation Korean American youth parallels Hybels's original concern for the unchurched, and this is why I have chosen to draw from the Willow Creek model as I seek to create a worship

[39] Jeong-Min Kim, *The Hymns and Spirituality of Charles Wesley*, 253.

environment where young people can encounter Christ in a language and form that make sense to them.[40]

The Seekers Service Willow Creek Church

In the 1970s, many American churches continued to maintain traditional worship formats, even as a significant portion of the population became increasingly detached from religious institutions. A new category of individuals emerged during this period, those with spiritual curiosity but little connection to organized religion. These were the "seekers," individuals interested in exploring faith, yet uncomfortable with or disinterested in the conventional structures of church life.[41]

Recognizing this shift, Bill Hybels proposed a new church model that would intentionally reach this demographic. In 1975, he founded Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois. His goal was to create a church environment where both devoted Christians and spiritual seekers could feel welcomed and engaged. This gave rise to the now well-known concept of the Seeker Sensitive Church.[42]

The church at Willow Creek avoided standard liturgical worship services by creating a completely new approach which matched the cultural values of modern

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[40] See the account of Willow Creek's origins and its seeker-oriented services in "As Willow Creek Turns 50, the Onetime 'Church of the Future' Redefines Itself," *ChurchLeaders*, October 8, 2025, accessed March. 6. 2026, https://churchleaders.com/news/2206272-willow-creek-turns-50-rns.html/2.

[41] Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1993), 5–6.

[42] G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 21–23.

American society. The Sunday services known as "Seeker Services" at Willow Creek featured multiple distinctive elements.

1. A Non-Threatening Environment: The church avoided religious jargon, formal dress codes, and practices that could alienate or intimidate non-believers. From the parking lot to the platform, the church sought to create a space where first-time visitors could feel relaxed and accepted.[43]
2. Contemporary Music and Artistic Expression: Instead of traditional hymns, the worship experience featured contemporary Christian music (CCM), live bands, theatrical drama, video clips, and dynamic lighting. This allowed for a more relatable and emotionally engaging worship environment.[44]
3. Practical and Relevant Preaching: Sermons were based on Scripture but intentionally crafted to address everyday concerns—family, work, relationships, stress, and meaning.[45] the use of plain language and accessible illustrations made biblical teachings understandable to the unchurched.
4. Intentional Hospitality: Visitors were invited to "come as they are," with greeters and volunteers trained to offer a warm, informal welcome. The physical space, language, and structure of the service were carefully designed to reduce cultural distance between the church and its guests.[46]

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[43] Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, 48.

[44] Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 55.

[45] William Chadwick, *Stealing Sheep: The Church's Hidden Problems with Transfer Growth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 73.

[46] Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, 58–59.

5. Small Group Ministry: Beyond Sunday services, the church emphasized small group involvement as a means of fostering deeper spiritual growth, accountability, and community.[47]

This seeker-sensitive approach quickly proved effective. By the 1980s and 1990s, Willow Creek had grown into one of the largest and most influential churches in the United States. Inspired by its success, many other congregations across North America and around the world adopted the model. To support and extend this movement, Willow Creek launched the Willow Creek Association (now the Global Leadership Network) in the 1980s. This organization provided resources, leadership training, and strategic guidance for churches seeking to reach unchurched populations in their own cultural contexts.[48]

The ministry model at Willow Creek established a major milestone in the evolution of culturally relevant worship practices across the United States. The seeker-sensitive model remains a fundamental example of church ministry and worship strategy transformation for cultural adaptation although it received criticism and underwent changes after internal evaluations.

Chodae Community Church – Multicultural and Multigenerational Worship

Chodae Community Church, located in Norwood, New Jersey, offers a compelling case study for multicultural and multigenerational ministry within the Korean immigrant church context. Recognizing the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of

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[47] Carl George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1991), 91.

[48] Willow Creek Association, "About Us," Global Leadership Network, accessed March 2025, https://globalleadership.org.

its members—including first-generation Korean-speaking immigrants and second-generation English-speaking youth—*Chodae* has developed a ministry model that embraces cultural diversity and generational integration.

The church hosts multiple worship services in Korean, English, and Japanese, reflecting its intentional commitment to linguistic inclusion and cultural sensitivity.[49] By doing so, *Chodae* acknowledges that worship is not only a spiritual act but also a cultural one—shaped by language, music, aesthetics, and relational dynamics. This framework aligns with Clifford Geertz's understanding of culture as a "web of meaning," in which symbolic forms carry spiritual and social significance.[50]

In practice, *Chodae*'s worship life includes creative and participatory elements, such as praise bands, multimedia presentations, and seasonal worship services that engage youth through music, art, and performance. While the church has not formally institutionalized drama worship as a weekly practice, its use of visual and narrative-based engagement in youth and young adult ministries reflects similar principles. Worship becomes a relational and embodied experience, rather than a purely auditory or cognitive exercise.[51]

The method directly meets the cultural requirements of second-generation Korean American youth who feel disconnected from traditional liturgical practices. The model developed by *Chodae* demonstrates how a Korean immigrant church can shift from heritage preservation to cultural adaptation for spiritual development. The space enables

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[49] Chodae Community Church, "Welcome to Chodae," accessed April 2025, https://chodae.org.

[50] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973), 89.

[51] David Lemley, *Becoming What We Sing: Formation through Contemporary Worship Music* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 103–106.

young people to encounter the gospel message in ways that preserve theological accuracy while creating emotional connections.

The *Chodae* Community Church offers vital lessons to immigrant churches which seek to transform their worship practices by implementing cultural ministry approaches. The church demonstrates that language integration with generational and worship style adaptation is crucial for developing faith among the upcoming generation. This approach suggests that immigrant churches must intentionally cultivate worship environments that remain theologically faithful while culturally responsive to the lived experiences of the next generation.

Conclusion

The case of Charles Wesley serves as a powerful example of how faith matures and becomes deeply rooted in culture. Early in his ministry, Wesley experienced significant missionary failure, yet through time, humility, and a growing sensitivity to people's needs, he achieved spiritual depth, which he expressed through his hymns.[52]His hymns flourished not despite culture but through it, blooming from the poetic, emotional, and social frameworks of his time. His example reminds us that culture is not an obstacle to the gospel; rather, it is a God-given means for communicating love and truth to people in their lived realities.[53] The effort and care with which he composed hymns for the illiterate and the poor tells us that his ministry was driven by humility and love.

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[52] John Tyson, *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 85–90.

[53] Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 174–176.

The current generation of Korean American youth develops from a unique cultural environment which includes their experience with multiple languages and their evolving identities as well as family expectations and societal pressures. The faith of their parents cannot be transferred automatically or mechanically to the next generation. It must be replanted through love, nurtured through humility, and expressed through the cultural vocabulary of the youth themselves.[54]

The mission to share Jesus Christ with them represents a holy duty which requires both tender care and unselfish humility. The God who entered human culture in the incarnation (John 1:14)[55] continues to desire to speak directly into the circumstances of young people today. We should view cultural differences as sacred tools which enable us to understand and share God's redemptive love in our own unique way.

The combination of deep theological content with emotional power and cultural understanding in Charles Wesley's hymns led to revival. The church today needs to find innovative participatory approaches which respect youth emotional responses and communication styles to lead them toward the living gospel. Drama worship emerges as a unique and forceful practice among contemporary worship methods. The practice enables young people to experience theological truths through active participation and emotional engagement and biblical storytelling. The dynamic environment enables people to experience faith through direct encounter and physical expression and personal living of their beliefs.

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[54] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 22–24.

[55] John 1:14 (NRSV): "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

We pledge to understand youth hearts through listening first because humility comes before leading. We promise to create loving environments which receive and respect the personal stories of young people while integrating them into God's overall story of redemption. Our mission goes beyond protecting the faith for future generations because of obligation. Through our actions we demonstrate the true meaning of the gospel by showing humility and love while experiencing joy. We will perform it, proclaim it, and live it, in ways that are faithful, formative, and fully alive.

Application to the Joy Korean Church

Wesley's cultural ministry concept provides a foundation for a new youth ministry approach in Korean churches in the United States which combines drama worship and small groups. The model exists to fulfill requirements of second-generation Korean American youth as well as first-generation immigrant families and other ethnic communities within the church. The model creates an environment for participants to practice intercultural communication while encouraging both spiritual growth and loving relationships through creative and relational activities.

The same approach Wesley used in band meetings which facilitated believer growth through confession and deep conversation and communal support will guide this youth ministry through small groups and drama worship. Students will experience a protected Christian environment through the program that enables them to describe their spiritual paths and discover their cultural roots and resolve intergenerational conflicts. Through drama worship students will discover a powerful method to communicate their

faith stories and life experiences by performing and storytelling while using visual arts to express their spiritual and cultural narratives.

The DMin project targets youth ministry in Korean immigrant churches in the United States and uses drama worship as an effective approach to help members of different cultural backgrounds become more understanding of each other. This project is based on the spirit of Charles Wesley's approach to ministry; it believes in the power of people coming together, telling their stories, and being spiritually transformed through creative means. Just as Wesley's cultural ministries were a place where believers could have profound, vulnerable conversations that resulted in personal and communal transformation, this initiative is an extension of that idea for Korean immigrant youth.

Drama worship will be used to have the youth participants talk about their ideas and experiences and then share them freely and honestly, in a process that starts with simple questions and gradually progresses to more complex, vulnerable discussions. These carefully designed questions will ask them to discuss their challenges, cultural practices, and life experiences and thus help them develop higher levels of empathy within the community.

At the end of this process, the youth will have better friendships with their peers and the ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultures. This paper will argue how the drama worship space can become a safe and creative area for them to express themselves, tell their stories, and think about their cultural relation to their faith.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

This project specifically focuses on youth within immigrant church communities, particularly second-generation Korean American adolescents who navigate complex cultural and spiritual identities. The doctrine of the Incarnation is a central tenet of Christian theology, asserting that God became human in the person of Jesus Christ. This profound mystery encapsulates the union of the divine and human natures within Christ, allowing for a unique relationship between God and humanity. The Incarnation signifies not only the physical embodiment of God but also the transformative implications of this union for human existence and the created order.

The application of Paul Hiebert's "Incarnational Missionary Ministries" to local ministry contexts represents a vital opportunity to engage communities through a model that emphasizes the embodiment of Christ's love and presence in everyday life.[1] Hiebert's framework encourages ministries to reflect the principles of the Incarnation, which is foundational to understanding how God interacts with humanity. This approach not only seeks to communicate the gospel message but also to live it out in practical ways that resonate with the cultural and social realities of the community being served.

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[1] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 91–94.

At the core of Hiebert's incarnational model is the idea that effective mission requires a deep understanding of the context in which ministry occurs. This aligns where the goal is to connect anthropological insights with mission practice.[2]

Moreover, the concept of incarnational ministry encourages local churches to contextualize their efforts, ensuring that their approaches resonate with the cultural and social realities of the communities they serve. Hiebert himself has emphasized the necessity of integrating character, skills, and knowledge in ministry preparation, advocating for a holistic approach that begins within the local church.[3]

Paul Hiebert pointed out that there is no simple formula for planting churches. Churches are the work of God and of humans. On the one hand, God acts in the lives of people, calling them from sin, giving them the power to respond to his call, and gathering them together in communities' munities of faith. On the other, humans invite others into the church and disciple them in Christian maturity. In one sense, churches are like no other human groups because of the work of God's Spirit within them. In another sense, they are very much like other social groups, burdened by the normal problems of human life and relationships. The church is a reflection of the incarnation: it is both divine and human.[4] Because of this aspect of the church, we need a deep understanding of the incarnational ministry that Paul Hiebert advocates for full ministry in the church.

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[2] Darrel. L Whiteman, *My pilgrimage in mission. International Bulletin of Mission Research*, 47(4), 536-547. https://doi.org/10.1177/23969393231173853. 2023.

[3] Hibbert, E., Williamson, L., & Williamson, B. (2023). *How should we prepare people for ministry to nomads?.* Missiology: An International Review, 52(1), 102-116. https://doi.org/10.1177/00918296231208385

[4] Paul G. Hiebert; Eloise Hiebert Meneses. *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Kindle Locations 1995), 131-135.

In conclusion, the application of Paul Hiebert's "Incarnational Missionary Ministries" to local ministry contexts offers a compelling vision for engaging communities in transformative ways. By embodying the principles of the Incarnation, local ministries can foster reconciliation, contextualization, and ethical living, ultimately reflecting the love of Christ in their communities.

This approach not only revitalizes the church's mission but also invites individuals into a deeper relationship with God and one another, thereby fulfilling the call to be the hands and feet of Christ in a broken world.

Furthermore, the principle of incarnational ministry is deeply theologically connected to drama worship.[5] If the Incarnation is the event where God entered human history and culture to reveal Himself, then drama worship can be seen as an attempt to embody the truth of the Word within the community not as an abstract concept, but in a concrete and experiential way. Drama worship transcends being a mere educational tool; it can be seen as a form of incarnational practice that embodies the gospel story through the body and enables communal experience.

Foundations of Paul Hiebert's Incarnational Ministry

Terms of Incarnational Ministry

The term "incarnational ministry," like "missional" or "Emergent Church," is employed in a diverse array of contexts. Occasionally, "incarnational ministry" refers to a

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[5] For a theological connection between embodiment and dramatic expression in worship, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 37.

ministry that transcends cultural boundaries to provide an embodied presence to individuals in need.

"Incarnation" means literally "en-fleshment" or, slightly more fully, "embodiment in flesh." The question of where the concept of incarnation is to be found in the biblical texts is mostly dependent on whether that definition is interpreted in a broader or a narrower sense.[6]

In its missiological context, incarnational ministry underscores that missionaries must personify the Gospel message by profoundly engaging with the cultures and circumstances to which they are assigned. It was an anthropologist and missiologist named Paul Hiebert who brought the word incarnation into a missional context. Hiebert further on this notion by asserting that the missionary's ministry should reflect Christ's mission on earth, immersing oneself in the community and interacting with others within their own context, rather than functioning solely as an external agent of transformation.

Paul Hiebert correctly states that this incarnational approach to ministry means that we need to meet people where they are, not where we are, and he argues that fundamental to incarnational ministry is communicating the gospel in terms they can understand. To speak these terms, it is an important premise that we must learn to see the world as the people we are evangelizing see it. Paul Hiebert also says that we should not reject their culture and try to replace it with our own, arguing that to do so is to destroy their identity and dignity.[7]

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[6] James D. G. Dunn, "Incarnation", ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 397.

[7] Paul G. Hiebert, Eloise Hiebert Meneses. *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Kindle Locations 749-751). Kindle Edition.

Taking the above together, incarnational ministry is a missiological term that is derived from a theological term. It can refer to a missionary's entire lifestyle, including his or her attitude of mind, but in missiological terms, it can also be used as a mission's strategy. However, in a stricter sense, Paul Hiebert uses the term incarnational ministry to mean not to diminish the sociological aspect of the humanities in missions that deals with the things of God.

> Mission is more than a text. It must take flesh in human contexts. texts. We must make the gospel known not to humans in general, but to real people who live in particular times and places in history, tory, who are members of real societies and who share common languages and cultures. How can we learn to know these contexts-the languages people speak, the social systems in which they live, the cultures and worldviews that shape the way they see reality? Here social sciences can help us. Anthropology and sociology help us study people's social and cultural contexts by living with people, observing them, and listening to what they say. Psychology helps us examine people's personal contexts-their deep emotions and inner conflicts. History gives us insight into the events that have shaped their present. The social sciences can also help us understand human change-the factors that influence people's response to the gospel, the methods of evangelism most appropriate in a particular society, and the effects of conversion on the lives and beliefs of new Christians. These sciences can also help us understand young churches and the problems they face living as God's community in a fallen world.[8]

Thus, incarnational ministry means not abandoning a theological as well as a social science or anthropological perspective on mission. It insists that because it is human beings who do God's work, and because it is human beings who communicate and receive the gospel, an understanding of human beings is fundamental. Therefore, effective ministry requires careful attention to the cultural, social, and symbolic worlds in which people live and interpret the message of the gospel.

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[8] Paul G. Hiebert, Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry* (Kindle Locations 412-413).

Historical Background of Incarnational Ministry.

The historical context of incarnational ministry is profoundly rooted in the Christian tradition, reflecting a dedication to embody the principles of Christ in a variety of contexts, particularly among marginalized communities. This ministry is distinguished by its profound engagement with the lived realities of individuals, which underscores the significance of service, relationship, and presence. The concept of incarnational ministry can be traced back to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, who provided a paradigm for contemporary ministry practices by living among those he served.[9] The Incarnational concept of ministry was fundamental in the early church. The apostles and early Christians heeded Jesus' exhortation to be "with" individuals and to "make disciples" (Matthew 28:19-20). This ministry involved not just disseminating the gospel verbally but also engaging with individuals by integrating into their lives in significant manners.[10]

The Apostle Paul frequently characterized his ministry as one of solidarity with the people he served. In 1 Corinthians 9:22, Jesus states, "I have adapted to various individuals so that by any means necessary, I may save some." This methodology was profoundly relational and incarnational, underscoring that the gospel is most effectively conveyed through presence, relationship, and comprehension.[11]

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[9] On Jesus' life among those he served as the theological foundation of incarnational ministry, see Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 1–18; and Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 93–108

[10] For descriptions of the early church's shared life as a pattern of incarnational presence, see Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 129–152.

[11] On Paul's "becoming all things to all people" in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 as a model of contextual, self-giving ministry, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 194–198; and Founders Ministries, "1 Corinthians 9:19–23, Paul on Accommodation."

Until modern times, there was no terminological or academic definition of incarnational ministry, but Hudson Taylor is perhaps the best example of a missionary who practiced incarnational mission. Hudson Taylor, who founded the China Inland Mission (CIM), the predecessor of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF), which has grown to 18,625 Chinese believers and 1,152 Chinese workers, won the hearts of the Chinese by becoming like them, dressing like them, and living like them.[12]

Hudson Taylor's identification with the Chinese was controversial and criticized by his fellow Western missionaries at the time, but he laid down what he had and became as low as they were, whatever it took to win the hearts of the Chinese. This finally opened the door to missionary work, and the results were tremendous. Hudson Taylor was called the "Father of Missions. This is the heart of the incarnation of Jesus and the spirit of the missionary. An important example of his commitment to incarnation was his intensive effort to learn the Chinese language, believing that true communication required deep cultural and linguistic immersion.[13]

> The study of Chinese, also, was entered upon with ardor. Grammar of that formidable language would have cost more than twenty dollars and a dictionary at least seventy-five. He could afford it either. But with a copy of the Gospel of Luke in Chinese, by patiently comparing brief verses with their equivalent in English, he found out the meaning of more than six hundred characters.[14]

To participate in God's mission, the world church has held several mission conferences and studied strategies. The Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 and the Lausanne Missionary Conference of 1974 are the most important. The Edinburgh

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[12] Dr. Taylor, and Mrs. Howard. *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, 8. Kindle Edition.

[13] Paul G. Hiebert, Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry* (Kindle Locations 412–413).

[14] Dr. Taylor, and Mrs. Howard. *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, 12. Kindle Edition.

Missionary Conference was not so much a conference to discuss the theology of missions as it was to discuss "the evangelization of the world in this generation".[15] The Lausanne Missionary Conference, with its slogan, "Let the Earth Hear His Voice," also sought to effectively carry out world evangelization.[16] These conferences, and others that have studied effective mission strategies, emphasize the importance of points of contact.[17] This is because establishing points of contact is the most important thing needed to effectively communicate the gospel message to other cultures. However, Hendrik Kraemer argued that the most important point of contact is the cross-cultural missionary himself.[18]

In modern times, anthropological reflection on missions has become increasingly scholarly. Paul G. stands as a prominent figure in this shift, pioneering a missiological approach deeply informed by cultural anthropology. Hiebert emphasized that understanding the cultural context of a people is essential for faithful and effective missionary work.[19]

Hiebert's thought centers on critical contextualization as a main theme which states that the gospel message remains absolute, but its cultural expressions need

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[15] William Richey Hogg, "Edinburgh 1910 - Perspective 1980," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 4. No. 4, October, 1980, 146-153.

[16] John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant - An Exposition and Commentary. Lausanne Occasional Papers No. 3.* Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1974.

[17] Eugene Nida,. Message and Mission: *The Communication of the Christian Faith*. Rev. Ed. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1990.

[18] Hendrik Kraemer The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World. London, UK: Edinburgh House Press, 1947

[19] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 171–183.

thorough critical adaptation.[20] The practice of uncritical foreign cultural pattern imposition and gospel message compromise remains prevalent in modern missionary work despite its apparent obviousness. Hiebert advocated for a balanced approach which respects both Scripture and culture.[21]

This missiological posture finds its model in the Incarnation, where God entered human history within the specific cultural setting of first-century Palestine in the person of Jesus Christ. Hiebert argued that God's self-revelation has always been mediated through culture, making cultural sensitivity indispensable to mission practice.[22]

Moreover, Hiebert significantly advanced the concept of the incarnational ministry, particularly by emphasizing its cultural-anthropological dimensions. He highlighted the necessity of receptor-oriented communication, advocating for a gospel presentation that is both theologically faithful and culturally intelligible.[23]

Hiebert's framework helped create new missiological models which focus on the actual experiences and cultural beliefs and social systems of receiving communities thus developing a fully incarnational and participatory mission approach.

Moreover, Hiebert significantly advanced the concept of the incarnational ministry, particularly by emphasizing its cultural-anthropological dimensions. He

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[20] Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11, no. 3 (1987): 104–112.

[21] See also Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 75–92, where he contrasts non-contextualization, uncritical contextualization, and critical contextualization as a biblically faithful way between ethnocentrism and syncretism.

[22] Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 56–58.

[23] Paul G. Hiebert, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 25–28.

highlighted the necessity of receptor-oriented communication, advocating for a gospel presentation that is both theologically faithful and culturally intelligible.[24] This perspective, effective ministry always begins with careful listening and learning before speaking and acting in the name of Christ.

Scriptures on Incarnational Ministry

Main text on Incarnational Ministry by Paul Hiebert

J. Todd Billings[25], research professor of Reformed theology at Western Theological Seminary defines incarnational ministry as follows. “The term "incarnational ministry,” like missional or Emergent Church, is used in a wide variety of ways. Sometimes ‘incarnational ministry’ means ministry that crosses cultural barriers to be an embodied presence to people in need. At other times, it’s used to talk about culturally relevant analogies for the gospel. In still other contexts, ‘incarnational ministry’ has become shorthand for affirming that intellectual assent to faith is not enough-faith needs to become embodied and ‘incarnate’ in acts of love and service, as in the earthly ministry of Jesus”.[26]

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[24] Paul G. Hiebert, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 25–28.

[25] Dr. J. Todd Billings is the Gordon H. Girod Research Professor of Reformed Theology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, MI. An ordained minister in the Reformed Church in America, he received his M.Div. from Fuller Seminary and his Th.D. from Harvard.

[26] J. Todd Billings, *Incarnational Ministry and the Unique, Incarnate Christ, https://www.modernreformation.org/resources/articles/incarnational-ministry-and-the-unique-incarnate-christ#top2,* accessed 12.10.2024

Paul Hiebert argued that, in mission, we must go beyond understanding the divine text and human contexts. We must proclaim divine revelation to people in their diverse settings. Here the incarnation is our model. Just as the infinite Creator became incarnate as a human to reach finite people, so the divine revelation must take flesh in human languages and cultures. Just as Christ chose to live in a particular time and setting, so we must incarnate our ministry in the contexts of the people we serve.[27]

In Matthew 4:23-25, We should note in this passage how Jesus ministered and where his ministry was centered. He certainly preached the values of the kingdom of God to people, but his main stage was in the places where people gathered for religious activities at the time.

> **23** And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. **24** So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. **25** And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. [28]

From these biblical accounts of Jesus Christ's ministry, we can see that Jesus Christ had a mission from God from heaven.

Paul Hiebert says that communicating the gospel in the human context requires a third way of theology, a biblical way of thinking about God's universal mission in the here and now, with all its particularities, paradoxes, and confusion. We call this third theology missional theology, but we emphasize that the same principles of studying the

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[27] Paul G. Hiebert; Eloise Hiebert Meneses. *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Kindle Locations 413-413). Kindle Edition.

28 The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Matt 4:23–25.

Bible, studying people, and incarnating the gospel in human life apply equally to pastors, church elders, and indeed to all Christians. [29]

Paul Hiebert gives an example of incarnational ministry from his own missionary experience in India. When evangelizing a man who had been raised in a Hindu background for many years, he questions whether he is likely to be fully converted after a single hearing of the gospel.

> Papayya also knows many of the 330 million Hindu gods. But the stranger says there is only one God, and this God has appeared as a human only once. Moreover, the stranger says that this Jesus is the Son of God, but he says nothing about God's wife. It is all confusing to Papayya. He returns home and a new set of questions flood his mind. Can he still go to the Hindu temple to pray? Should he tell his family about his new faith? And how can he learn more about this Jesus? He cannot read the few papers the stranger gave him, and there are no other Christians in his village. Who knows when the stranger will come again? Can Papayya become a Christian after hearing the Gospel only once? This depends, in part, on what we mean by the term "Christian." If by this we mean that he can be born again and enter the family of God, the answer must be yes. If by this we mean that he understands the Gospel adequately enough to communicate it without essential distortion to others, and knows what it means to live a Christian life, the answer must be no. If we form a church of one hundred Papayyas and no further biblical teaching, the heart of the Gospel will soon be lost. Their traditional worldviews will turn it into another Hindu sect. We see examples of this in the case of Simon the converted sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24), the sons of Sceva (Acts 19:11- 16), the people of Lystra (Acts 14:8- 13) and Malta (Acts 28:3-6)[30]

If you look at the characters in the texts he gives as examples, they seem to be converted when they first hear the gospel, but then they either get rebuked by the apostle (Peter) because of their understanding of the gospel, or they go back to their old way of life.

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29 Tite Tiénou and Paul G. Hiebert*, "Missional Theology", in The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 44.

[30]Paul G. Hiebert, *Conversion and Worldview Transformation*, International Journal of Frontier Mission, VOL 14:2 Apr.-June 1997.

In effect, Hibbert categorizes biblical examples as missionary failures, he argues that in planting churches we must differentiate between what is essential in the conversion of new believers, and what is a true understanding of the Gospel and Church in their cultural and historical settings–in other words, what constitutes salvation, and what is the goal of Christian discipleship and maturity. We need to keep both in mind. We need evangelists to lead people to Christ, but if we expect them to grow on their own in Christian knowledge and life without discipling them, they and the church will be weak. We need biblical scholars, theologians and elders to help us understand Scripture accurately and to grow in Christian faithfulness, but without evangelism the church soon dies.[31]

Main Ideas of Incarnational Ministry

Humility is the Key Word of Incarnational Ministry

According to Matthew 28:19-20, the goal of missions is to make disciples of Christ from all nations, and to become a disciple is to be baptized and live according to the Word of God. This means that becoming a disciple of Christ involves a change of status or identity to become a child of God (baptism) and a change of life to live by the Word (teaching and observance). If the goal of missions is to bring about this change of status (identity) and life, then we must ask how this change can be accomplished, and what is it that God has done to transform us human beings.

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[31] Paul G. Hiebert, *Conversion and Worldview Transformation,* 72.

The Apostle Paul tells us that the core value of the incarnation of Jesus Christ is humility. In his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul talks about the humility of Jesus Christ.

> [3] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, [4] not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. [5] In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: [6] Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; [7] rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. [8] And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross! [9] Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, [10] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. [32]

J. Todd Billings claims that the God's love is not love from a distance, but love up close, love made manifest in a culturally particular, person-to-person way. The Incarnation is the ultimate revelation of this character in the love of God. As those called to imitate this humble love (Philippians 2:5), missionaries must leave the compound, learn the language, becoming one with the people in need, just as Christ became one with a particular human culture. This theological emphasis should lead to a basic shift in orientation from the condescension of distance to assistance of the needy by becoming one with them. For some, this is used to promote the notion of grassroots community development, which seeks to address needs not by meeting them with outside resources, but by encouraging those in need to help themselves. This fundamental reorientation for mission is said to find its theological ground in the doctrine of the Incarnation.[33]

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[32] The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Philippians 2:3–11.

[33] J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 134–135.

Most importantly, especially in incarnational ministry, is humility of attitude. We must always be mindful of our attitudes toward those we are evangelizing and toward those of other faiths. In the past, we have tried to present Christianity with a conqueror mentality, imposing our faith on them with the logic that if it's good for us, it must be good for them, but this is not the way of humility.

Apostle Paul himself talks about the attitude of the Christian heart in Philippians 2:5 and emphasizes that humility is all about this attitude. *Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus*. This way of reading the sentence implies an ethical interpretation of the Christ hymn. Christ's attitude portrayed in the hymn is viewed as an ethical paradigm of the attitude that Christians should express in their community. According to this interpretation, Paul is urging believers to reshape their attitude in the life of their community by looking at the attitude seen in Christ's life. *In humility*, believers must *value others* (2:3) because Christ, the ultimate example of humility, *humbled himself* (2:8).[34]

Hiebert emphasizes the importance of having a humble heart when approaching other cultures, just as the incarnation of Jesus Christ was the perfect embodiment of humility.

> But what keeps us from interpreting the Scripture from our own cultural point of view, and so imposing many of our own cultural norms on other people? First, we need to recognize that we bring our cultural biases with us when we interpret the Scriptures. We must be open to recognizing these biases when they are pointed out to us. We also need to let the gospel work in the lives of new Christians and recognize that the same Holy Spirit who leads us, is at work in them. We need to allow them the greatest privilege we allow ourselves, the right to make mistakes and to learn from them. Also, we need to study both the culture in which we minister and our own in order to compare and evaluate the two. The

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[34] G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians,* The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 119.

> process of genuinely seeking to understand another culture breaks down our cultural biases and enables us to appreciate the good in other cultures. It is important, too that Christian leaders in other societies learn our culture to understand us.[35]

In Romans 1:14, the Apostle Paul said, “I am indebted to the gospel. To be indebted to the gospel means that we have a mission and obligation to preach it. None of us received the gospel by paying for it, for someone preached it to us without cost, and we received it. Therefore, Christians have a gospel debt to pay.

Gospel Debt and the Posture of Servanthood

Flowing naturally from the call to humility is the recognition of the Christian’s indebtedness to the gospel. In Romans 1:14, the Apostle Paul states, “I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.” This profound sense of gospel debt arises from the fact that believers have freely received the grace of salvation, a gift neither earned nor merited.

As recipients of such grace, Christians are compelled to share it—not out of superiority, but out of a deep sense of gratitude and obligation. This gospel debt redefines the missionary posture from one of dominance to one of servanthood. Missionaries are not benefactors who condescend to offer help; they are debtors who humbly share what they themselves have freely received. This sense of indebtedness demands a radical posture of service, mirroring the example of Christ, "who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

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[35] Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Differences and the Communication of the Gospel* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library Publishers, , 1976), 379.

In practical terms, this means missionaries approach others not with the assumption that they are bringing civilization or enlightenment, but with the humility of those who know they are unworthy servants bearing treasures entrusted to them by grace (2 Cor. 4:7). Their task is not to impose but to offer, not to conquer but to invite, not to dominate but to serve.

Furthermore, recognizing gospel indebtedness fosters patience and respect toward those among whom missionaries serve. As Paul Hiebert reminds us, humility requires allowing the Holy Spirit to work within new believers at their own pace, trusting that transformation is ultimately God's work, not the missionary's accomplishment.[36] This posture acknowledges that just as the gospel took root in the missionary's own life over time and through grace, so too it will take root in other cultures through the patient, incarnational witness of humble servants.

Experience in the Incarnational Ministry

Practice of Incarnational Ministry

Paul Hiebert argues that incarnation serves as a model in human relationships. First, as missionaries it means the missionaries must identify ourselves with the people they serve. They must live among them, learn their language, adopt cultural ways, and

[36] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 81–83.

work alongside them. Becoming one with people enables one to build trust and earn the right to be heard.[37]

Being involved in ministry doesn't mean copying cultural customs; it's, about adjusting respectfully to them in a manner that respects both the community and the gospel message. This might involve trying cuisine and dressing in a way that fits the culture; participating in rituals can also be appropriate. Adapting to cultures should be done with care to keep the central gospel message intact while breaking down any obstacles to understanding it.

The essence of ministry lies in establishing connections, through genuine relationships rather than mere words alone; trust is cultivated through sustained acts of love and dedication that transcend verbal expressions. Missionaries showcase their solidarity by engaging in the lives and hardships of the community they serve portraying themselves not as influences imposing alien beliefs but as companions and kin who truly empathize. This relational groundwork fosters a receptiveness, to the teachings of the gospel.

Formative Experience in Incarnational Ministry

In incarnational ministry, formation does not occur primarily through explanation or instruction alone. Rather, faith is shaped over time through shared life and sustained presence. Incarnation, therefore, is not only a theological confession but also a lived process in which belief is gradually formed through proximity, participation, and

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[37] Paul G. Hiebert; Eloise Hiebert Meneses. *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Kindle Locations 4146-4148). Kindle Edition.

everyday practice. As missionaries choose to live among the people they serve—sharing meals, learning local rhythms, and entering into ordinary routines—the gospel is no longer encountered merely as an idea to be understood, but as a reality that is observed, tested, and embodied within daily life.[38]

This formational process highlights the relational nature of incarnational ministry. Trust is rarely established through words alone. It is built slowly through consistency, availability, and a willingness to remain present even when progress is unclear or costly. In such contexts, missionaries are not positioned above the community as instructors delivering spiritual content. Instead, they become participants in a shared journey, shaped by the same relationships through which the gospel is made visible.

Importantly, formative experience in incarnational ministry is not one-directional. While missionaries seek to bear witness to the gospel's transforming power, they themselves are continually formed and reshaped in the process. Immersion in another cultural context often exposes unexamined assumptions, cultural blind spots, and inherited habits of faith. In this way, incarnation invites not only identification with others, but also ongoing self-examination and repentance within the missionary's own life.[39]

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[38] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, 91-94.

[39] [1] On incarnational ministry as an embodied, relational presence in which missionaries walk alongside people rather than stand above them, see "Incarnational Ministry -Living Among the People You Serve," All People's Church, accessed March 12, 2026, https://apcwo.org/incarnational-ministry-living-among-the-people-you-serve. For the mutual transformation that occurs as missionaries immerse themselves in another culture, sharing in the joys and struggles of those they serve, see "Christlike Missionaries: Reflecting Jesus in Cross-Cultural Ministry," accessed March 12, 2026, https://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/christ.htm.

Two Movements of Incarnational Ministry

True incarnational ministry moves in two directions: identification and transformation. First, missionaries are called to identify with the people to whom they are sent, adopting their cultural forms as expressions of respect and solidarity. Second, missionaries must also bear faithful witness to the transformative power of the gospel, which calls every culture—not just the "other's," but also the missionary's own—to repentance and renewal.

The challenge is to live fully within a culture while also pointing beyond it to the kingdom of God, discerning what to affirm, what to critique, and what to redeem. In this dynamic tension, incarnational ministry reflects the pattern of Christ, who became fully human without ceasing to be fully divine, and who lived within a particular culture while inaugurating a kingdom that transcends every culture.

Incarnational Formation in Immigrant Youth Ministry

Youth ministry represents a particularly vital context for incarnational formation, as adolescents tend to engage in faithlessly through abstract concepts and more through lived experience, relationships, and embodied participation. For many young people—especially those navigating cultural hybridity, questions of identity, and rapid social change—faith is not primarily formed by what is explained, but by what is experienced alongside trusted adults and peers.

In this context, incarnational ministry in youth settings emphasizes presence over programming and relationship over information. When leaders choose to enter the everyday world of young people—listening to their stories, sharing their questions, and

remaining present through uncertainty—faith becomes something encountered within relationship rather than imposed through instruction. Such proximity creates space for trust, which is essential for any meaningful spiritual formation to occur.

Formative experience in youth ministry also requires patience. Adolescents often explore belief through hesitation, doubt, and experimentation rather than immediate commitment. An incarnational approach recognizes this process not as failure, but as a normal part of faith development. By resisting the urge to rush outcomes or demand visible results, youth ministers mirror the posture of Christ, who walked patiently with his disciples long before they fully understood the meaning of his mission. The incarnational youth ministry acknowledges that formation is mutual. As leaders accompany young people through questions of faith and identity, they too are shaped by these encounters. The gospel is rediscovered not only in moments of clarity, but also in shared struggles and unresolved tensions. Over time, such shared experiences form a community in which faith is not merely taught, but lived, tested, and slowly integrated into the lives of young people.

Conclusion

Paul Hiebert approached mission not merely as an act of transmitting the gospel message, but as a critical inquiry into how the gospel is interpreted and internalized within the lived world and worldview of human beings. He argued that faith is not primarily shaped by isolated doctrinal knowledge but rather governed by worldviews formed through culturally embedded patterns of thought and repeated lived experiences. From this perspective, Hiebert warned that when mission remains confined to the

cognitive level, the gospel may be communicated as information but fails to function as a transformative power capable of reconfiguring life itself.[40]

Hiebert further described worldview not simply as an intellectual system, but as an implicit framework through which people perceive, interpret, and inhabit reality. He emphasized that such frameworks are formed less through logical explanation than through symbols, narratives, customs, and communal practices.[41] This understanding provides significant insight into the realities of Korean immigrant churches in the United States. These congregations exist at the intersection of generations and cultures, where the same gospel message is received in markedly different ways by first-generation immigrants and second-generation believers, particularly youth. Nevertheless, many immigrant church worship services and educational practices remain largely language-centered and explanation-driven. As a result, the gospel may be assented to intellectually, yet it often fails to take root as a formative language of identity.

To address this limitation, Hiebert insisted that missional practice must incorporate experiential and formational dimensions. He maintained that when the gospel enters a cultural context, it must move beyond mere translation of message and be embodied within concrete patterns of lived practice.[42]

From this perspective, drama worship can be understood as a concrete expression of incarnational ministry. Rather than treating Scripture as an object of explanation alone, drama worship invites participants into the biblical narrative itself, engaging body,

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[40] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, 81–83.

[41] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 45–47.

[42] Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 27–30

emotion, and relational interaction in the experience of the gospel. Such participatory engagement transforms the gospel from an abstract doctrine into a lived event, enabling faith to be perceived not simply as something to be learned, but as a reality to be inhabited.

Consequently, drama worship may be regarded as an embodied and educational enactment of the incarnational missiology articulated by Hiebert. The gospel neither stands above culture nor is it uncritically absorbed by it; instead, it enters the lived contexts of immigrant youth and functions as a formative force shaping their worldview. This suggests that Korean immigrant churches in the United States are called to move beyond transmission-centered models of ministry toward an incarnational pastoral approach that enables the gospel to dwell within the lived realities of the next generation.

Application to Youth Student of Joy Korean Church

Informed by Paul Hiebert's incarnational theology, the six-week drama worship initiative at Joy Korean Church represents a contextual and participatory approach to youth discipleship. This program is not merely an artistic outlet, but a liturgical pedagogy that integrates biblical memory, personal reflection, and communal formation. Rooted in the belief that mission must take on flesh in real contexts, the series invites youth not just to learn the biblical narrative, but to inhabit it.[43]

Youth in immigrant churches require intentional efforts that recognize and engage their unique cultural language and lived experiences. Because their identity is often

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[43] Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 317.

shaped at the intersection of multiple cultures, effective ministry must move beyond traditional forms of instruction and seek ways to communicate the gospel within the symbolic and relational world they inhabit.

The integrated approach at Joy Korean Church demonstrates Paul Hiebert's definition of incarnational ministry which teaches from beside rather than from above and shares embodiment instead of domination. The purpose of this initiative is not to shape young people into their parents' religious beliefs but to introduce them to the living God through experiences that match their personal path while remaining connected to the eternal message of Scripture.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The interdisciplinary foundation of this project is understanding new generation with interpretive anthropological insights. The mission field is the place where two or more different cultures and worldviews meet, where Christianity and other religions engage in interaction.

Clifford Geertz[1] was not a missiologist but a cultural anthropologist, so he never directly defined "mission" in the theological or evangelical sense. However, we can infer from his interpretive anthropological framework what kind of implications his thought might have for understanding mission, especially in intercultural or inter-religious contexts.[2]

Geertz saw culture as a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms—like rituals, myths, and social practices—through which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.[3] In his view,

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[1] Clifford James Geertz (1926–2006) was an American cultural anthropologist best known for developing symbolic and interpretive anthropology and for defining culture as a "system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms" that give meaning and order to people's lives; he taught at the University of Chicago and later at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton and became one of the most influential anthropologists of the late twentieth century.

[2] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973), 3–30.

[3] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures,* 89.

religion is not just a system of belief, but a cultural system that helps people make sense of their world.

From this perspective, mission would not be the simple transmission of doctrine or belief from one culture to another. Instead, mission would be an act of intercultural interpretation, where the missionary must learn and engage with the host culture's symbols, meanings, and practices in order to communicate the gospel in a way that resonates with that worldview.[4]

In short, under Clifford Geertz's interpretive framework, mission is less about exporting truth and more about interpreting it within the symbolic world of another culture. It suggests that missionaries must become cultural interpreters before they can faithfully communicate the gospel.[5]

From the perspective of this hermeneutic anthropology, drama worship is not merely a variation in worship format, but rather a way of reinterpreting and embodying the gospel within the symbolic world. If culture is a system that constructs meaning through symbols, then drama becomes the very arena where those symbols are concretely reenacted and reconfigured. Youth are not passive recipients merely listening to doctrine; they become active interpreters who connect the meaning of the gospel to their own cultural experiences by physically expressing biblical narratives and reenacting them within their context.

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[4] Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 291.

[5] Charles Van Engen, *MissionShift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2010), 12

Drama worship provides a space to help them reconstruct the gospel narrative within the structures of their language, emotions, relationships, and conflicts.

Therefore, when understood within Geertz's hermeneutical framework, drama worship becomes a space for intercultural interpretation and a practical space for faith formation. The gospel is not an abstract truth injected from outside but is reinterpreted and embodied within the community's symbolic world. In this process, participants do not merely learn faith; they come to understand and internalize the gospel anew within their own cultural identity.

Precisely in this regard, drama worship can be seen as the practical intersection where hermeneutical anthropology and missional theology meet.

Culture Theory: The Thick Description and Web of Meaning

Geertz's work on cultural interpretation presents the results of a fieldwork study. The article, "Deep Play: Notes on Cockfighting in Bali," is a classic example of "Thick Description," taking place in a remote village on the Indonesian island of Bali, where Geertz conducted fieldwork with his wife, a fellow anthropologist, in 1958. The relationship between the Balinese villagers and Geertz and his wife begins with disregard and indifference, but after a police chase to break up the village's collective gambling on the winnings of fighting chickens, the American anthropologist and the Balinese villagers become intimate.

The Balinese, who witnessed the Geertz and his wife fleeing the scene of a cockfight, begin to explain to them the various cultural anthropological data about cockfighting in their village. In reinterpreting the Balinese villagers' interpretation of

cockfighting, Geertz provides a prime example of thick description. Geertz summarizes the "thick description" of cockfighting in Bali as follows.

> A people's culture is a set of texts, and anthropologists try to figure out what those texts mean by looking over the shoulders of the people who own them. This is fraught with challenges. There are methodological pitfalls and moral confusion and confusion. It's also not the only way to socially analyze symbolic forms. Functionalism is alive and well, and psychology is useful. But treating symbolic forms as saying something about something, and as saying something to someone, at least opens the way to a way of analyzing them that pays more attention to their substance than to the simplified formulas that claim to explain them. In other words, societies, as in life, have their own interpretations within them. We just need to learn how to access that interpretation."[6]

In this point of view, Clifford Geertz also offers the following cultural anthropological view of religion,

> Sacred symbols function to synthesize a people's ethos—the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood—and their world view—the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order. In religious belief and practice a group's ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world view describes, while the world view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well-arranged to accommodate such a way of life.[7]

In other words, sacred symbols possess more than merely religious significance; they function as comprehensive representations of a people's cultural, moral, and emotional worldview. They do not simply point to transcendence but organize the way a community understands life itself.

Therefore, we may encounter someone who claims to be agnostic or unaffiliated with a particular religion yet still live according to deeply embedded "religious"

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[6] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures,* 92.

[7] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures,* 93.

commitments. Even when a person does not adhere to an institutional faith, their worldview continues to shape their lifestyle, values, and attitudes. In this sense, what ultimately structures one's perception of reality functions religiously. A person may accept atheism as an intellectual position yet existentially operate within a symbolic framework that orders meaning, identity, and moral orientation. Human beings are never without such orienting influences; they are always shaped by some ultimate horizon of meaning.

According to Geertz, culture is not simply a backdrop for human behavior, but a "web of meaning"[8]—an interpretive framework through which people perceive reality and locate meaning. Within this paradigm, religious belief is inseparable from cultural symbols; it is not merely believed, but embodied and enacted through shared rituals, values, and narratives. Human beings live within these webs of meaning, interpreting their experiences and constructing their understanding of reality through cultural symbols.

Religion as a Cultural System

Starting from the premise that everyone is religious without realizing it, Clifford Geertz defines religion in the following clear way. Geertz defines religion as:

> (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an (5)aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.[9]

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[8] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89.

[9] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures,* 96-97.

Through the thoughts of the Clifford Geertz, religion is not only defined as a set of beliefs, but also as a system of symbols that help people to feel and act, to understand the order of the world and to accept it as the reality. In the modern world adolescents are secularized and have left traditional religion but they are still religious in both the material and the non-material sense.[10]

Today's youth are creating their own versions of worldviews from social media, pop culture, ideologies, and personal beliefs. For instance, fandom culture provides fans with a sense of place and purpose based on their love of a particular singer or entertainer, just as faith communities provide traditional religions. Environmental activism, human rights activism or commitment to a certain political and social vision are also strong beliefs and have a significant impact on the life of an individual.[11]

In this sense, even where formal religion declines, symbolic systems of meaning continue to function powerfully in the lives of young people.

Understanding the Context of Second-Generation Immigrant Youth

A veteran youth ministry practitioner Dean Borgman[12] says that the youth, their families, and their peer groups are complicated because of their individuality, their localities, and their associations. Combinations of digital and face-to-face relationships

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[10] Clifford Geertz famously defines religion as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic"; see Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87–125.

[11] Dean Borgman, *Foundations for Youth Ministry,* 5-7.

[12] Dean Borgman is a veteran youth ministry practitioner and theologian who has taught at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and worked extensively with at-risk youth. For a comprehensive overview of his approach to culture and adolescence, see his discussion in *Foundations for Youth Ministry: Theological Engagement with Teen Life and Culture*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

add to the complexity. The impact of cultures and subcultures—of systems-within-systems—on the lives of young people is enormous. The digital age has produced a whole new environment. A failure to understand the larger, deeper picture can lead to frustration and burnout for youth ministers.[13]

In light of Borgman's insight, the situation of Korean American churches in the United States presents a sobering example. While there are numerous signs indicating the growth and vitality of Korean American congregations, there remains a lack of empirical data assessing the effectiveness of church ministries among second-generation Korean American adolescents and young adults. Anecdotal evidence and qualitative observations, however, suggest a concerning trend: many second-generation Korean Americans are disengaging from their parents' churches.

According to Michael Dimock, president of Pew Research Center[14], Generations are often considered by their span, but again there is no agreed upon formula for how long that span should be. [15]

These patterns of disengagement cannot be understood apart from broader generational shifts in American society. In other words, the challenges facing Korean American churches today are not only ethnic or immigrant issues but are also deeply

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[13] Dean Borgman, *Foundations for Youth Ministry: Theological Engagement with Teen Life and Culture*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 5.

[14] The Pew Research Center (also simply known as Pew) is a nonpartisan American think tank based in Washington, D.C. It provides information on social issues, public opinion, and demographic trends shaping the United States and the world. It also conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, random sample survey research, and panel-based surveys, media content analysis, and other empirical social science research.

[15] Michael Dimock, Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins, accessed 1.30.2025.

shaped by the values, habits, and social realities of the generations now coming of age. Before considering specific ministry responses, it is therefore essential to clarify who these younger generations are and how they are commonly described in contemporary research.

Generation Z & Alpha

Today's middle and high school students span two generational cohorts. First, Generation Z generally refers to those born between 1997 and 2012. This group includes most current high school students, as well as some early 2012-born students who are now in their first year of middle school.[16]

Second, Generation Alpha includes those born in 2013 and onward. A few middle school students born in late 2012 may fall into this emerging generation.

Therefore, while most current high school students clearly belong to Generation Z, a small segment of middle school students straddle the boundary between Generation Z and Generation Alpha.

Interestingly, today's middle and high schoolers find themselves in a transitional position—witnessing firsthand the end of Generation Z and the rise of Generation Alpha. This generational overlap shapes their cultural identity, digital fluency, and social values in unique ways.[17]

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[16] For commonly used birth-year ranges for Generation Z, see Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York: Atria Books, 2017), 30–31; and Pew Research Center, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins," 2019.

[17] On the generational boundaries between Gen Z (typically 1997–2012) and Gen Alpha (2013–present), see Pew Research Center, "Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins," January 17, 2019; and Jean M. Twenge, *iGen* (New York: Atria Books, 2017), 30–31.

As such, any ministry or educational approach to this age group must account for their hybrid generational experience.[18]

Dr. Seok Jae Jeon[19], a Korean missiologist, states that Generation Z is a generation that cannot tolerate boredom. He also says they prioritize immediate utility over planning for the future. Furthermore, he suggests that Korean and American youth share this commonality.[20] To share the gospel with this generation, it is believed that an experiential gospel is more important than emphasizing its validity. Therefore, experiential worship on a missional level is necessary, and it is believed that this experiential worship can be realized through the form of drama.

The apostle Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, "And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, you must also charge to faithful men, that they may be able to teach others". Here we have four generations of spiritual transmission. In the Korean American church, the gospel must continue to be shared with second - fourth generation, but unfortunately, there is a sad statistic that seventy percent of two-year-olds leave the church as they move from high school to college, a "*silent exodus*". This may be due to various secular influences in the United States, or it may be due to a lack of biblical education at home, but in some ways, it may also be due to the fact that Korean

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[18] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 66.

[19] Seok Jae Jeon is a professor of missiology at Seoul Theological University. Earned a Ph.D. from United Theological Seminary in the United States in 2004 with the dissertation "Evangelism Strategies for the New Generation in Digital Culture." Currently, aspiring to build bridges, care, and mission for the next generation, he established the Next Generation Research Institute and serves as its representative.

[20] Seok Jae Jeon*, Korean Church 2025: The Future of the Church Depends on Gen Z* (Incheon, South Korea: Next Century Institute, 2024), 38.

churches are not ready to accept the next generation.[21] In addition, recent research has argued that the problem is no longer only a "silent exodus" of second generation, but a broader "silent divergence" in which changing immigrant society and unchanging immigrant churches are growing further apart.[22]

Youth in Korean American Church

In light of these realities, the ministry of second-generation Korean Americans must be understood not merely as internal church education but as a form of cross-cultural mission. I believe that ministering to second-generation immigrants requires a missionary attitude. Many have told me that they have been able to reach non-believers with the gospel. Just as a missionary goes to another country to reach unbelievers who live in the same country but in a different culture, he or she must first learn their language and find effective ways to share the gospel in their culture, so second-generation immigrants have their own unique culture. If it is considered a missionary act for pastors in the United States to share the gospel with non-believers who speak the same language and live in the same culture, how much more missionary-minded must we be when reaching out to second-generation Korean Americans? Unlike the first generation, they speak a different language, live in a different cultural framework, and often experience a significant generational gap.

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[21] Daniel Wong, *"The Asian North American Experience"*. In Finding Our Voice: A Vision for Asian North American Preaching (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 37–38.

[22] Jung-Ho Oh, "From Silent Exodus to Silent Divergence: Changing Immigrant Society, Unchanging Immigrant Church," *Journal of Language, Culture, and Religion* 2, no. 2 (2021).

The general ministry structure for second-generation immigrants in the United States has developed in a distinctive pattern; The Korean Congregation (KC) is started, and a Children's ministry (CM) is started within it. As the children grow up, a youth ministry (YM) is started, and when they go to college, an English ministry (EM) is started. Usually there is a small EC (English Congregation) within the KC (Korean Congregation). As the EC grows, it will have its own programs, and eventually the KC and EC will coexist on an equal footing. Furthermore, there is a model where the EC becomes independent. When the EC and KC are separated, in some cases, there is a model of starting EM again within the KC. There is also a model in which an advanced EC goes on to start KM (Korean Ministry).[23]

We must recognize that second-generation Korean Americans are not only younger versions of ourselves but also, they are culturally distinct individuals shaped by a different set of values, experiences, and worldviews.

Therefore, it is not enough to expect them to inherit our faith in the same forms and expressions that were meaningful to us. Rather than forcing them to conform to our familiar ways of worship or ministry, we must adopt a missionary mindset—one that seeks to understand before being understood, and that prioritizes cultural sensitivity over tradition.

Having a missionary heart means being willing to embrace forms of ministry that may not feel comfortable or familiar to us whether that involves new worship styles, contemporary music, casual dress, or even unfamiliar leadership structures. Even if those

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[23] Elaine Ecklund, *"Korean American Evangelicals". New Models For Civic Life* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 2006, 8.

expressions feel foreign or even off-putting to us, we must remember that the gospel is not bound to one generation's preferences.

It is the message of life that transcends culture and time, and we are called to clear the way for the next generation to encounter it fully in their own language, both literally and culturally. Remembering that the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9 that he treated Jews as Jews and those without the law as those without the law in order to save them, we too must be the first generation to take off our comfortable clothes and open the door for them to do ministry in the way they want to do it, of course the gospel must not be changed, but in clothes that fit them.

As we discussed in the previous chapter, missionaries should not hesitate to take a cultural anthropological approach to their mission target. In fact, with the emergence of a new generation, we must take a cultural anthropological approach to them for the next generation of missions. In this regard, the interpretive anthropology of Clifford Geertz offers an important framework for understanding how meaning is constructed within cultural systems.

Contextualization as Cultural Interpretation

Faithful and effective gospel communication in multicultural contexts demands more than linguistic translation. It calls for deep cultural interpretation—what Clifford Geertz identifies as the work of deciphering symbolic forms within a cultural system.[24]

In many secondary-culture contexts, such as second-generation Korean American churches, a failure to engage with these symbolic systems has led to growing spiritual

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[24] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 5.

disengagement. Youth often find Sunday worship services irrelevant or unengaging, citing sermons as abstract and disconnected from real life.

This disconnects points to a deeper issue than generational preference; it reveals a failure to communicate the gospel in culturally meaningful ways. As Charles Kraft argues, true communication requires that both communicator and receptor share similar symbolic frameworks, allowing meaning to be mutually constructed.[25] In such settings, contextualization is not optional—it is essential for the gospel to be understood and embraced.

Contextualization, therefore, is best understood as the interpretive act of translating the gospel within the symbolic and cultural logic of a particular community.[26] Paul Hiebert emphasized that effective contextualization requires missional practitioners to engage both theological integrity and cultural sensitivity, so that the gospel message remains transformative without being co-opted by the host culture's dominant ideologies.[27]

This interpretive process is not merely pragmatic; it is theological. Just as the incarnation of Christ involved full participation in the cultural and linguistic world of first-century Palestine, so too must gospel proclamation today reflect an incarnational posture—one that listens deeply, observes carefully, and speaks contextually.

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[25] Charles H. Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 113–114.

[26] Darrell L. Whiteman, "Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 21, no. 1 (1997): 2–7.

[27] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1985), 171–172.

In addition to anthropological interpretation, the use of systems thinking may further empower ministries working within complex cultural landscapes.

Just as cultural anthropology reshaped missions in the mid-twentieth century, systems thinking—a practitioner-oriented, holistic social science—can help church leaders understand how meanings are formed and transmitted within dynamic social environments.[28] Systems thinking helps ministries develop adaptive living models of discipleship by studying the interconnected relationships within communities including family systems and generational dynamics and cultural expectations.

The practice of contextualization functions as a theological necessity beyond its status as a missionary technique. The gospel needs to be received in all languages and within every symbolic world. According to Geertz cultures develop their own distinct ways of understanding life. Christian leaders must first learn to understand the interpretations of others before becoming faithful gospel communicators by entering their world as servants who create space for the Word to reside.

Interpretation Before Proclamation

According to Geertz missionaries, should avoid teaching doctrine abstractly because they need to learn about the lived meanings of the people they serve. The missionary must first practice deep cultural listening which Geertz terms “thick description” before proclaiming the gospel.[29] The process of thick description requires

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[28] Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990), 6–9.

[29] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3–30. Geertz contrasts "thin description" (mere surface observation) with "thick description" (layered cultural interpretation).

missionaries to decode rituals and narratives and gestures and everyday practices in order to reveal the symbolic logic which shapes a community's worldview.[30]

The process of cultural interpretation stands as a fundamental theological practice rather than a pre-requisite for theological work. The meaningful proclamation of Christ requires knowledge about how people in different cultures interpret suffering and justice and hope and transcendence. This approach protects against cultural imperialism while enabling the gospel message to be translated both linguistically and existentially. Thus, proclamation must follow interpretation.

From Understanding to Embodiment: The Next Step in Mission

If proclamation must follow interpretation, then the next step in mission is embodiment. Just as Jesus entered into human history not as a distant messenger but as the incarnate Word—living, speaking, and acting within a specific cultural context—missionaries must also move beyond analysis to participation. The incarnation provides the ultimate model for missional engagement.[31] It calls missionaries not merely to understand the symbolic world of others, but to live within it, to share in its joys and sorrows, and to express the gospel in forms that emerge organically from that context.[32]

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[30] For missionary application of thick description, see Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1985), 45–62.

[31] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 512.

[32] Charles Van Engen, *MissionShift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2010), 12.

Geertz's anthropology, when applied through an incarnational lens, reminds us that transformation happens not by importing external systems of belief but by allowing the gospel to take flesh within the local symbolic universe.[33]

This means allowing indigenous forms of worship, community leadership, and spiritual expression to emerge—even if they look unfamiliar to the sending church. It means trusting that the Spirit is already at work within the culture and that the missionary's role is to discern and nurture this work, not to replace it.[34]

Embodied interpretation also challenges missionaries to examine their own cultural assumptions. The goal is not to escape culture, but to enter another's with humility, vulnerability, and theological attentiveness.[35]

As Geertz notes, every society carries within it its own interpretation of life.[36] Missional faithfulness, then, is about stepping into that interpretive space, listening deeply, and letting the Word become flesh there.

Embodied Faith within the Web of Meaning

The restrictions of language-based discipleship methods become more apparent for second-generation Korean American ministry. The youth population shows no opposition to the gospel message, yet they dislike the current presentation methods which use monological preaching and theological vocabulary. The traditional lecture-based

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[33] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89–91.

[34] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 30–32.

[35] Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 7–10.

[36] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 10.

teaching methods which have been fundamental in the past lose their effectiveness with youth who learn better through visual content and interactive experiences and experiential activities.

The process of contextualization within this environment needs to advance past basic language adaptation and teaching methods. Practice needs to develop fresh methods of embodiment which will engage all aspects of human experience including mental and emotional and physical and imaginative elements. Drama worship functions as a liturgical practice which allows Scripture to be performed through actions and communal storytelling and reinterpretation.

Through drama worship second-generation youth experience the gospel as a living experience instead of just receiving information. The performances allow participants to become active participants in the story of God instead of receiving religious content passively. A student who takes Peter's role must experience the conflict between denial and forgiveness. The character of Mary Magdalene in the performance requires the actor to think about how resurrection hope relates to their personal life. Through role-playing experiences youth start to absorb theological truths both intellectually and emotionally and through narrative understanding.

From a cultural-anthropological perspective, this method aligns with Clifford Geertz's insight that cultures are "webs of meaning" where symbols, rituals, and performances construct reality.[37] Drama worship becomes a symbolic form in which the community performs its faith, negotiates its values, and reclaims its story. It becomes an

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[37] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89.

interpretive act—a form of "thick description" in which youth and leaders together explore what the gospel means in their world.

Conclusion

Immigrant churches occupy a unique and significant position in shaping the faith journeys of individuals from multicultural and multilingual backgrounds. These communities function not only as houses of worship but also as sacred spaces where identity, belonging, and belief converge. For second-generation youth, especially those raised between their parents' heritage culture and the dominant culture of their host society, spiritual formation occurs within a terrain marked by cultural tension, linguistic hybridity, and evolving identity.[38] In this liminal space, the gospel cannot be taught in abstraction; it must be embodied in ways that reflect and respond to the symbolic worlds they inhabit.[39]

This DMin project affirms that traditional, programmatic approaches to youth ministry—rooted in linear teaching and language-based proclamation—are increasingly ineffective in this context. Instead, what is required is a shift toward participatory and interpretive models of discipleship that engage youth as whole persons—culturally situated, emotionally complex, and spiritually curious. Drama worship offers a compelling alternative. As an embodied and narrative-based expression of faith, it allows youth to inhabit the biblical story with their minds, bodies, and emotions, resulting in

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[38] Rebecca Y. Kim, *God's New Whiz Kids? Korean American Evangelicals on Campus* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2006), 47–49.

[39] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89.

deeper engagement and transformation.[40] The liturgical structure provides a framework where theology exists as an experience that people both encounter and question while living it.

Furthermore, applying systems thinking to immigrant youth ministry helps practitioners move beyond reactive programming toward holistic, dynamic processes that consider generational, familial, and sociocultural systems.[41] The new approach focuses on creating an environment that will help faith grow instead of determining which content to teach. This way of thinking transforms the ministry from delivering products to developing processes and from teaching information to creating a living culture.

Ultimately, immigrant churches must become sites of cultural and spiritual integration, where youth are empowered to reconcile their ethnic and theological identities in meaningful ways. Intercultural communication becomes central to this task—not simply as a skill, but as a theological practice of listening, interpreting, and reconciling across difference.[42] When churches embrace contextualization not as accommodation but as incarnation, they create the conditions in which the gospel is not only heard but embodied.[43]

This research aims to assist youth from diverse cultural backgrounds to take active ownership of their faith by developing meaningful spiritual practices. The children of immigrant families attend church services but frequently maintain a distance from

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[40] Wesley Vander Lugt, *Living Theodrama: Reimagining Theological Ethics* (London, UK: Routledge, 2014), 97–99.

[41] Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, 6–9.

[42] Charles H. Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian*, 115.

[43] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, 108–109.

religious teachings and practices. The faith experience of these young people remains passive because they receive their religious beliefs through inheritance instead of personal acceptance.

Youth discipleship in these settings requires more than conventional teaching approaches. The approach needs to establish connections with their cultural background as well as their creative expressions and real-life experiences. Drama worship stands as an effective method for worship. The practice of drama enables young people to enter biblical stories while making them personal experiences. The practice of dramatizing biblical stories enables youth to experience faith through their emotions and physical presence in addition to mental understanding.

Through drama worship young people learn to recognize the connections between their personal life stories and God's story. Practice transforms abstract beliefs into concrete experiences which youth can both experience and practice in their daily lives. The worship practice enables members to both express themselves and reflect on their experiences while building connections with others. The practice enables young people to transition from church spectatorship to active participation in faith-based activities.

Churches can disciple youth effectively through creative embodied methods including drama worship because these approaches directly address their identity and lifestyle. The practice of faith evolves beyond traditional beliefs to become an authentic and life-changing experience.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The research project investigates how immigrant church youth develop their faith through separate experiences which create a split between their biblical knowledge and their emotional connection to God and their actual religious practices. Young people receive cognitive instruction through sermons and Bible lessons, yet they do not get to experience Scripture through physical activities and emotional connections and regular practice of their faith. The situation becomes more complicated because immigrant communities face three major challenges which include bicultural conflicts and generational gaps and different language abilities that prevent young people from actively participating in their faith community.

The daily experience of many teenagers makes it difficult for them to identify God's presence while they remain unclear about their faith connection to their self-identity and they need enduring spiritual practices which extend past their church activities. People tend to practice their faith through external actions instead of developing genuine internal spiritual practice. Young people tend to withdraw from church activities when they face spiritual or emotional challenges which leads them to view faith as a requirement instead of a personal relationship.

The pastor and ministry leader of a Korean immigrant church in Huntsville–Madison conducted a six-week drama-worship intervention to solve these problems. The

project combined three methods which included Scripture interpretation through body experience and journaling and group discussions to create a complete spiritual development process for young people. The curriculum led participants through a sequential biblical path which started with learning to hear God's voice and then progressed to trusting God during times of uncertainty and facing doubts with authenticity and recognizing God's presence through silence and acting based on faith and finally assessing their spiritual development.

The six-session drama-worship program allowed participants to experience Scripture through physical performance which transformed biblical text into lived experiences. Through movement activities and dramatic performances and reflection sessions and small group discussions youth participants learned to understand their faith through mental processing and developed emotional bonds with God while learning to apply their beliefs into purposeful actions. The participants achieved better comprehension of their faith while developing more intense spiritual bonds and they became more dedicated to their religious rituals.

The research project "drama worship for Holistic Faith Formation among Immigrant Youth" shows that drama worship functions as an optimal pastoral approach which helps people develop their faith through complete spiritual development in their thinking and feeling and doing abilities. The project provides an effective solution for immigrant churches to develop strong faith in their young members through its context-based worship approach which involves active community engagement.

Methodology

General Methodology

Qualitative research methods were employed in this project through pre- and post-program open-ended questionnaires, brief end-of-program individual interviews, and in-session analysis of participant journals and small-group discussions. Data were collected from multiple sources, including pre- and post-surveys, individual exit interviews, group discussions during the sessions, weekly journal writing assignments, and systematic observation notes focusing on participants' verbal and nonverbal communication.

This multi-source qualitative approach allowed for triangulation of data to capture changes in participants' faith understanding, emotional engagement, and lived practice over the course of the six-week drama-worship intervention.

Description of the Project

The research study included six young participants (12–17 years old) who belonged to a Joy Korean immigrant church based in Madison Alabama. The sessions included several youths who observed parts of the sessions, but researchers did not obtain any data from them. The researcher performed this research while serving as pastor and ministry leader of the church throughout the entire research period. The researcher observed youth facing multiple ongoing difficulties which affected their religious development and their formation of identity and their participation in the immigrant church community.

The research aimed to fulfill spiritual development requirements of immigrant young people through an integrated religious service which united scriptural knowledge with emotional participation and physical expressions of faith. The project established a learning environment which combined cognitive instruction with experiential education through dramatic activities and reflective discussions and group conversations.

The project model emerged through integration of biblical and theological principles with interdisciplinary knowledge about embodied learning and spiritual development and contextual ministry practices. The program uses Drama worship as its main educational and worship approach because it enables students to study Scripture through physical expression and character acting and narrative sharing which leads to individual reflection and group discussion about shared understanding.

The model serves to help participants identify God's presence while they learn to share their faith experiences and develop purposeful ways to respond to God through their daily activities. The participants should use Scripture as both written text and personal life story while they should study each week how the session themes relate to their personal experiences.

The project created growth possibilities for participants through its purposeful session design which followed biblical texts and spiritual development methods. The participants followed a structured format which included embodied Scripture activities and guided reflection and group discussion sessions to achieve faith development through cognitive affective and conative learning. The participants received weekly journal prompts which asked them to discover new knowledge and express their feelings and develop specific actions based on their session experiences.

The research required participants to attend six face-to-face sessions which spanned 60 minutes each. The participants needed to finish the pre-program survey before their first session which measured their initial views about faith knowledge and their emotional bond and their religious activities. The participants answered a post-program survey after finishing the six-session program. The researchers evaluated participant growth through pre- and post-survey assessments which measured their faith development in cognitive affective and conative domains.

The research used survey data together with weekly journal entries and small-group discussion topics and final project interviews to obtain additional information. The program gained complete understanding of participant spiritual growth through the combination of its different data collection methods.

Collecting Data

The research team obtained written data by asking participants to complete surveys before and after the program and to write in their journals each week. The researcher documented additional qualitative data by observing participants during drama activities and small-group discussions while paying close attention to their physical conduct and their social behaviors.

The research participants who were minors required all data collection procedures to follow Alabama state regulations and institutional ethical standards. The research team received written authorization from parents and legal guardians for all participants before starting the study and the youth participants provided their own minor consent. Students

had the option to participate voluntarily in the study while receiving information about their right to exit the project at any point without facing any negative consequences.

The participants protected their confidentiality through all written materials by choosing their own identification codes which remained anonymous. The project team applied these codes throughout all survey and journal and reflection activities which took place before the project started and throughout the project duration and after the project completion. The research team stored all observation notes and interview summaries in protected environments which followed IRB approval and Safe Sanctuary policies and state regulations for working with child participants.

Implementation

Initial Preparatory Activities

Implementation of this project followed the approved protocol under United IRB (IRB #: United-24-25-57) for the study titled The Imperative of Faith Education for the Next Generation of Immigrants Through drama worship. The project site was Joy Korean Church (980 Hughes Rd. Madison, AL 35758), and the approved study dates were September 7, 2025 to October 12, 2025.

The six-week program began after church communication channels completed their recruitment and orientation procedures. The research team distributed project announcements to parents and students through church bulletins and newsletters during the first month after IRB approval to introduce the study to them. The project team organized an informational meeting for parents to take place during their scheduled

meeting time in mid-August to explain all project aspects. The project team distributed consent materials which participants needed to return before starting work on the project and they needed to confirm their participation before beginning the first session. The project required us to follow Alabama state law and United's ethical standards and the church's Safe Sanctuary policy during all recruitment and implementation activities because it involved working with children. The study required participants to obtain written authorization from their parents or guardians and to give their own consent as a minor. The study participants received information about their free participation choice and their right to stop participating at any moment without facing any negative consequences. The participants received their assigned biblical text and drama script for the upcoming week during the previous session. Students needed to study the script before class while they should use prayer to understand the passage which helped them both understand the material and stay focused on its spiritual value.

The six-week drama-worship program operated from September 7, 2025, until October 12, 2025. The researchers distributed a pre-program survey when participants started the study before they began the six-week program and then gave them a post-program survey when the program ended. The research team conducted individual interviews after all participants finished their last session. The researchers began their data collection and initial analysis work right after the program ended.

Curriculum Structure for the Drama-Worship Program

The program started with prayer at the beginning of each session which established a structured format for all meetings. The approved outline guided the delivery

of each weekly session through a 60-minute format which remained consistent throughout the program. The structure consisted of four distinct sections which were created to maintain session uniformity while following the curriculum plan.

Table 1. Program Detail

Time (Minutes)	Session	Instructor
10	Pre-activity (survey item, reflection prompt, or icebreaker)	Researcher
20	Lecture of Foundations	Researcher
15	Drama worship presentation	Researcher
5	Break	Researcher
30	Small group sharing and feedback	Researcher

The rhythm of this program was created to help participants develop personal reflection through journaling and group discussion activities which would connect them to their community throughout the six-week period.

Session 1: Recognizing God's Voice — 1 Samuel 3:1–10 (September 7, 2025)

The first session marked the beginning of the project through an introductory pre-activity which measured participants' spiritual perception before the program started (pre-program survey items and guided reflection). The participants took part in a Bible-character quiz which featured characters who received divine revelations from God. The drama showed a student who tried to pray but failed to hear God because of the many interruptions. The participants finished their task by writing down their experiences of

hearing God's voice in the journal prompt. The group discussion required members to pay close attention while they learned to distinguish between different things before they prayed together.

Session 2: Faith in Uncertainty — Genesis 12:1–4 (September 14, 2025)

The second session focused on how to discern God's direction when His guidance remains unclear. The main story followed a student who needed to make a tough choice while he searched for direction but lacked any definitive solutions. The participants wrote in their journals before they started a discussion about how obedience creates conflicts with situations where things remain unclear. The researcher provided short biblical and theological analysis which followed the approved protocol by showing how Abraham received his divine summons to young people who face similar choices today. The session ended with a time of prayer.

Session 3: Overcoming Doubt — John 20:24–29 (September 21, 2025)

The third session explored how doubt exists as an essential part of faith development which shapes believers. The drama showed a student who lost his religious beliefs because God did not respond to his prayers in the way he expected. The participants finished their journal work before they joined a group discussion which focused on their experiences with honesty and vulnerability and their need for peer support. The session ended with prayer followed by an announcement that participants had the right to keep any information they wanted to protect.

Session 4: Prayer and listening — 1 Kings 19:11–13 (September 28, 2025)

The fourth session taught participants about prayerful listening while showing them how God reveals himself through peacefulness. The drama showed Elijah's experience with the "still small voice" while it demonstrated how his expectations differed from the actual experience of listening to a soft voice. The participants used journaling to reflect on God's different responses which sometimes included remaining silent. The session ended with prayer followed by a short request for participants to try basic prayer and listening practice.

Session 5: Taking Action in Faith — Matthew 14:28–31 (October 5, 2025)

The fifth session focused on the topics of fear and courage and obedience. The drama showed a student who refused to obey God because he feared he would not succeed just like Peter did when he took his first step of faith. The participants wrote about their challenges with obedience before they discussed the source of their ability to follow God's plan. The session ended with prayer while participants received guidance to select one achievable action which matched their comfort level and ability to perform.

Session 6: Reflecting on Growth — Philippians 1:3–6 (October 12, 2025)

The last meeting brought the six-week program to its end through survey distribution and participants received additional time to integrate their learning and share their experiences. The participants discussed their program learnings through a guided discussion which followed a theological summary that focused on three main points: gratitude and perseverance and trust in God's ongoing mission. The session concluded

with a time of prayer. The research team conducted individual post-program interviews after the program ended according to the approved research plan.

Project Results

Anonymized Pre- and Post-Assessment Findings

Six youth participants completed pre- and post-assessments measuring Cognitive, Affective, and Conative development using a five-point Likert scale (1 = very low, 5 = very high). All participants are anonymized as P1–P6. The assessment tools were administered during Week 1 (Pre) and Week 6 (Post) of the six-week drama worship intervention.

Quantitative Overview

Across all participants, measurable growth was observed in each domain. The average increases from pre- to post-assessment were as follows:

Cognitive: +1.02, Affective: +1.18, Conative: +1.27

Notably, the largest average gain occurred in the conative domain, suggesting that participants demonstrated increased continuity of faith-related behaviors and practices beyond the structured sessions.

Participant-Level Changes

P1: Cognitive 2.6 → 3.8 | Affective 2.4 → 3.7 | Conative 2.2 → 3.4

P2: Cognitive 2.9 → 3.6 | Affective 2.2 → 3.2 | Conative 2.5 → 3.8

P3: Cognitive 3.1 → 4.0 | Affective 2.8 → 4.1 | Conative 2.3 → 3.2

P4: Cognitive 2.4 → 3.5 | Affective 2.1 → 3.1 | Conative 1.9 → 3.0

P5: Cognitive 3.7 → 4.1 | Affective 3.0 → 3.8 | Conative 3.6 → 4.0

P6: Cognitive 3.0 → 4.2 | Affective 2.3 → 3.2 | Conative 2.4 → 3.5

Table2. Pre- and Post-Program Changes in Cognitive Faith Growth

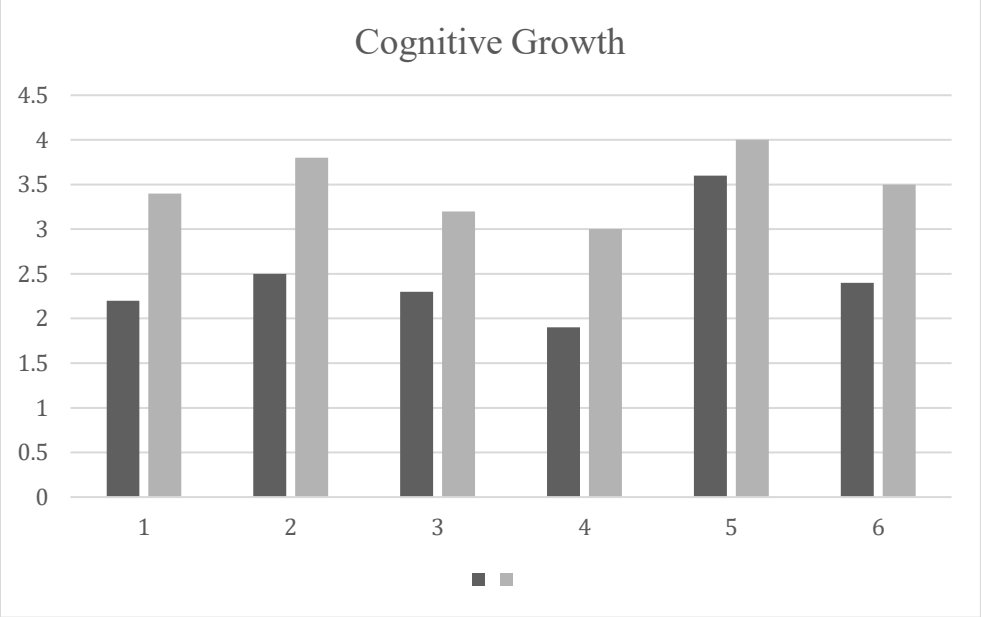


Table 3. Pre- and Post-Program Changes in Affective Faith Growth

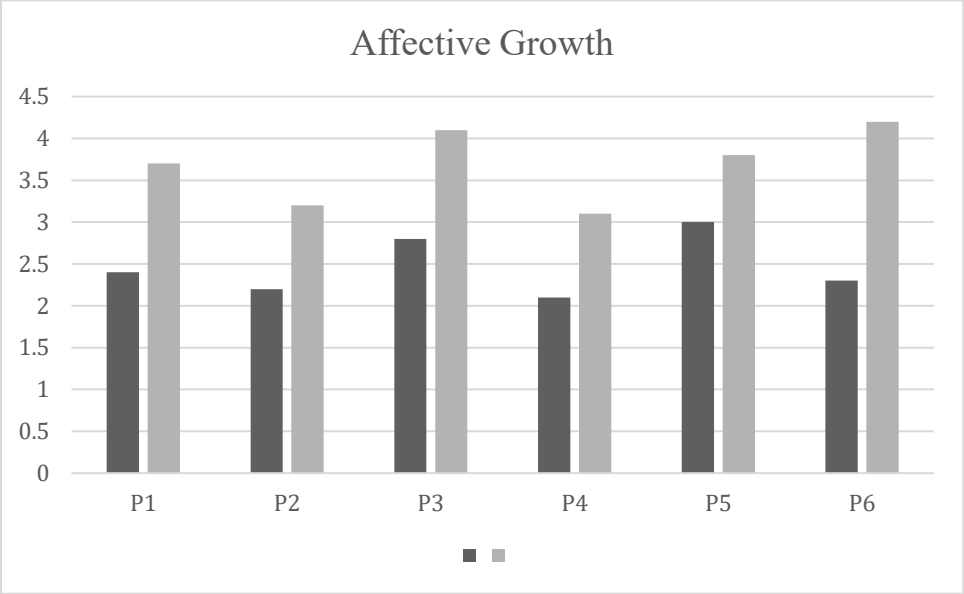
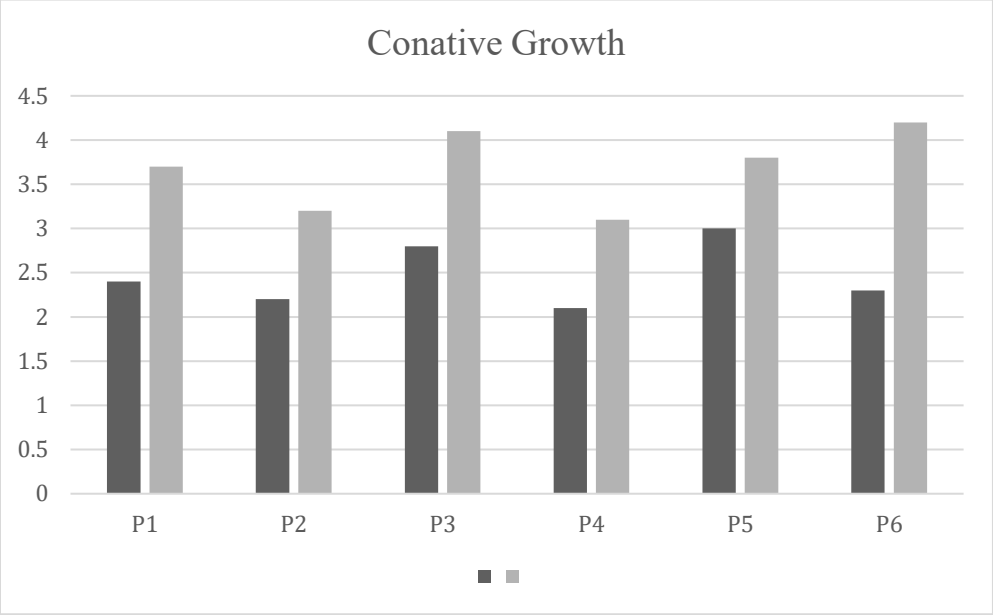


Table 4. Pre- and Post-Program Changes in Conative Faith Growth



Summary of Learning

The research results support the project's problem statement because they show the six-week drama worship program solved the issues Korean immigrant church youth encountered when building their faith through cognitive and affective and conative development because of cultural conflicts and family member separation. The study showed that participants who started with weak emotional ties to God and infrequent religious activities experienced the most significant development in their affective and conative aspects.

The research findings validate the project's hypothesis which predicted that a drama worship program using physical activities with Bible study and journaling and group discussions would help immigrant young people develop their spirituality. The research indicates that drama worship served as a practice which enabled participants to transition from being uninvolved to becoming actively involved in worship activities

particularly benefiting those who were most at risk of becoming disconnected during the program's beginning.

Pre- and Post-Survey Comparisons

I conducted an analysis of participant response patterns to understand how the drama worship intervention affected their faith development from week one to week six. The research involved six young participants who were evenly distributed between three male and three female participants. The research participants belonged to Joy Korean Church youth ministry in Huntsville–Madison and their ages spanned from fourteen to seventeen.

The research investigated how participants developed their faith understanding and their emotional bond with God and their active participation in religious practices through a specific drama worship program. The development of pre- and post-survey instruments and weekly journal prompts required researchers to understand both the developmental needs of adolescent participants and the bilingual and bicultural environment of a second-generation Korean immigrant church.

The research design included Likert-scale survey items together with open-ended questions which asked participants to share their faith-related perceptions and experiences and practices from before and after the program. The pre- and post-project questionnaires functioned as vital assessment instruments which measured participants' faith-related knowledge changes and their emotional involvement and behavioral dedication. The participants experienced and understood their changes through their

weekly journal entries and their small-group discussions which took place at Joy Korean Church.

The following section analyzes each domain of cognitive affective and conative elements through an evaluation of pre- and post-survey response patterns.

Question Set 1: Cognitive (Understanding & Awareness of Faith)

Q1. "How confident are you in recognizing when God is speaking to you?"

Pre-survey pattern: The participants showed baseline results which indicated they had low to moderate confidence about hearing God's voice while they remained uncertain because they experienced distractions and their busy lives and struggled to identify spiritual guidance from their regular mental processes.

Post-survey pattern: The participants showed better domain-level confidence after completing the six-week curriculum with an average score of 1.02 at the Cognitive +1.02 level. The qualitative indicators showed that recognition occurred through more than hearing or watching dramatic performances because people also experienced it through peaceful mental focus and both mental and physical signs which led to understanding.

Interpretation (Pre vs Post): The curriculum structure which starts with Scripture followed by physical practice and then writing and finally group discussions seem to have enhanced participants' confidence in their ability to make decisions. The program follows a weekly structure which starts with recognition followed by action instead of treating discernment as a single ability to learn.

Q2. “How often do you think about how God is involved in your daily life?”

Pre-survey pattern: The participants identified a difference between what they learned at church and their actual experiences during the week because they felt God operated independently from their school activities and social connections and important choices they needed to make.

Post-survey pattern: The post-program responses which included domain gain and interview and journal themes showed that participants started to use their faith practices in their daily activities. The participants showed how they could use their faith practices such as silence and breath prayer and short gratitude practices in their regular activities.

Interpretation: The program based its strength on its basic spiritual practices which provided long-term spiritual growth for young people who needed practices that matched their everyday activities. The practices allowed people to remember their faith because they did not need to spend time with extended prayers or focused attention. The church experience transformed religious faith into a practice which people needed to rediscover throughout their ordinary daily activities.

Q3. “In what ways do you believe God communicates with people today?”

Pre-survey pattern: The participants generally understood their baseline through their knowledge of Bible reading and prayer practice, but they showed uncertainty about how to recognize circumstances and inner promptings when their emotions were conflicting.

Post-survey pattern: The participants developed their conceptual framework through the program which showed they gained better theological authorization to identify quietness and silence and embodied awareness as authentic channels through which God communicates.

Representative qualitative indicator: A participant transformed their understanding of silence after the program because they now saw it as holding substantial value instead of being without value. “Silence is not absence; it’s where He calls me.” (P3)

Interpretation: The evidence indicates that human thinking evolved because God started to communicate through both direct answers and peaceful spiritual development which aligns with the Week 4 biblical passage (1 Kings 19:11-13).

Q4. “Have you ever experienced a moment during this program where you felt God was speaking to you?”

Pre-survey pattern: The study participants showed different levels of understanding because some participants were not sure if they had experienced these moments before while others described their impressions but lacked words to explain them.

Post-survey pattern: The post-program qualitative indicators presented results which were both more detailed and expressed from individual perspectives. The drama-worship format provided participants with words to identify their personal experiences even though they did not need to demonstrate absolute certainty.

Representative qualitative indicator: “Doubt is the crowd; coding faith means debugging fears.” (P4)

Interpretation: The program enabled participants to transform their doubts into meaningful experiences which led them to re-engage with their studies.

Q5. “How clearly do you understand the connection between faith and your daily decision-making?”

Pre-survey pattern: The participants demonstrated weak links between their faith and decision-making processes before the intervention because they could state their faith beliefs but failed to use them when facing peer pressure or stressful situations.

Post-survey pattern: The six-week period showed that decision-making skills developed faith-based thinking which became more evident during Weeks 2 and 5 when participants studied Genesis 12:1-4 and Matthew 14:28-31.

Interpretation: The curriculum started with action before participants achieved certainty because they learned to step forward (connation) which helped them understand how faith behaves when faced with challenges.

Question Set 2: Affective (Emotional & Spiritual Connection with God)

Q1. “How personally connected do you feel to God?”

Pre-survey pattern: The participants described emotional separation which developed because of their bicultural background and their distance from their parents and their challenge to share their spiritual battles in their bilingual immigrant church community.

Post-survey pattern: The affective scores showed an average increase of +1.18 while participants demonstrated better comfort with their personal encounter language through their qualitative responses which included presence and silence and invisibility and courage.

Interpretation: The way people think about faith has evolved from holding beliefs independently to building relationships with their beliefs. The intervention used physical methods which allowed participants to connect spiritually through nonverbal means even when they lacked words to express their feelings.

Q2. “How comfortable are you expressing your faith struggles or doubts?”
Pre-survey pattern: People generally started with restricted comfort levels because they tended to view their doubts as matters which needed to be concealed or solved right away.

Post-survey pattern: The group dialogue patterns together with the "anonymous Q&A channel" (which your curriculum structure describes) enabled participants to share their thoughts without worrying about receiving negative feedback. The process of doubt evolved into a search for answers instead of being seen as a sign of weakness.

Interpretation: The curriculum establishes a safe circle rhythm which creates an environment where students can experience doubt without fear (Week 3: John 20:24-29).

Q3. “Do you feel engaged in worship experiences at church?”

Pre-survey pattern: The students showed different levels of involvement because they actively joined class activities, but their personal understanding of the material remained weak.

Post-survey pattern: The participants showed higher involvement because drama worship provided them with a worship experience which required minimal language skills but allowed them to participate through physical actions and collaborative storytelling.

Interpretation: The worship practice of drama served as a religious language which helped immigrant youth who faced language challenges between their home environment and their church and their school environment.

Question Set 3: Conative (Behavioral & Action-Oriented Faith Commitment)

Q1. “How often do you pray outside of church?”

Pre-survey pattern: The frequency prayer at the beginning showed different patterns but people tended to miss their prayers during weeks when they experienced high levels of stress.

Post-survey pattern: The Conative scores demonstrated the most significant improvement through an average increase of +1.27. The micro-practices offered specific actions which

young people could perform repeatedly through breath prayer and short silence and gratitude naming without requiring perfect circumstances.

Representative qualitative indicator (transfer to daily life): The pre-game breathing process creates a sensation which allows me to move through the audience as if I were splitting through a group of people. (P2)

Interpretation: The evidence shows that people could carry their prayer rituals with them. The development of conation requires more than instruction because it needs students to practice through repeated activities and physical experiences.

Q2. “How often do you read the Bible on your own?”

Pre-survey pattern: The practice of independent Scripture engagement occurred at a low-to-moderate level because it mainly took place in church environments.

Post-survey pattern: The following information shows how Scripture engagement became more regular and purposeful through the conative domain increase and the curriculum design which included script and passage delivery one week in advance and guided reflection expectations.

Interpretation: The "advance script + passage reflection" structure functioned as a behavioral scaffold which directed students to read because they received both a specific purpose and relevant background information for their task.

Q3. “Do you feel motivated to grow in your faith / continue faith-based activities?”

Pre-survey pattern: The motivation existed but it remained weak because different external factors (school requirements and identity conflicts and social separation) kept interrupting it.

Post-survey pattern: The participants showed better commitment to maintaining their practices and joining future activities after the program ended. The Week 6 anchor (Philippians 1:3-6) showed that spiritual development continues as God actively works on us which leads to enduring motivation instead of brief emotional drives.

Interpretation: The research results show that participants achieved their highest level of conative gains which confirms the project's main assumption. The program's design which combined faith practice with communal storytelling and shared activities led to better long-term retention of faith among participants.

The overall pattern of cognitive, affective, and especially conative gains supports the central hypothesis that structured drama worship, combined with intentional small-group dialogue, fosters measurable spiritual growth among second-generation Korean American youth.

Journal

Following journal entry illustrates how Participant P3 experienced an integration of cognitive understanding, affective connection, and conative engagement through the drama worship program. The reflection demonstrates a shift from faith as a past event to faith as a present, embodied, and lived reality—supporting the project's hypothesis that drama worship facilitates holistic spiritual formation among immigrant church youth.

The six-week drama worship program helped me understand that my religious beliefs had undergone a significant transformation. My faith existed only in my past experiences before this experience. I recognized that I had previously met God, but the experience now seemed like a distant memory which no longer influenced my daily activities.

I started to rediscover my faith through drama worship during each week of the program. The combination of biblical story reenactment with silent contemplation and writing in a journal and group discussions revealed to me that faith exists beyond intellectual acceptance because it affects my emotional state and physical being. I became aware that my emotional states including stress and fear and pressure and longing directly related to my connection with God.

The program became my first experience with feeling overwhelmed by anxiety which intensified when I considered the expectations others had for me. The drama worship sessions provided me with time to stop and observe my internal experiences. The presence of God appeared in different ways because it sometimes manifested as a soft and enduring presence instead of a loud or dramatic display. The experience brought me a sense of calmness which reduced my fear levels.

I observed how my reactions toward faith transformed during my regular activities. I now feel comfortable praying with sincerity while participating in worship services and joining church activities because no one is pushing me to do so. My faith has evolved from being an obligation to become a relationship which I am discovering how to practice in my daily life. I now feel comfortable sharing my doubts and challenges with others instead of keeping them to myself.

The verse Isaiah 41:10 became my most important discovery during this experience because it states, “Do not fear, for I am with you.”

The program helped me transform this verse from a memorized phrase into a trusted truth which I now believe in. God exists as my ongoing companion who first appeared in my past and now accompanies me throughout my current life.

Interview

I conducted interviews with the participants in order to assess their responses to the program and to explore whether the program contributed to the strengthening of their faith.

P1 shared that he had been experiencing significant internal conflict due to cultural tensions between school and home. He explained that navigating two different cultural expectations often caused confusion about his identity and how he should live out his values. In addition, he admitted that he had previously misunderstood faith as something that only existed within the walls of the church. However, through participating in this program, he began to reconsider what faith means in everyday life and developed a growing interest in the existence and presence of God. This change suggests a meaningful and positive shift in his spiritual awareness.

P2, a second-year middle school student, reported that although he had attended church since childhood, he had never seriously reflected on what it meant to hear the voice of God or to have a personal conversation with a living God. His response indicated that while he possessed familiarity with religious practices, the program encouraged him to begin thinking about faith in a more personal and experiential way.

In addition, P2 shared that although his family environment appeared stable from the outside, he often felt that no one truly understood the concerns and inner struggles he carried. I consider this kind of honest expression to be a valuable sign of emerging spiritual self-awareness. The fact that he was able to articulate these inner thoughts within the context of the program suggests that the environment allowed participants to express their deeper emotional and spiritual realities.

Participant P4 had maintained a relatively consistent and sincere faith life prior to the program. However, he described himself as having a timid personality, which often made it difficult for him to step forward or express himself openly in daily life. Through the program, however, he testified that he became confident that God truly listens to his personal story and prayers. This realization appeared to bring him a sense of reassurance and spiritual encouragement.

Overall, these interviews suggest that the drama worship program did not merely provide cognitive instruction but also created a reflective environment in which participants could reconsider their understanding of faith, identity, and their relationship with God. Such responses indicate the potential of drama-based worship to foster deeper spiritual engagement among second-generation immigrant youth.

Conclusion

The Doctor of Ministry research investigated how a six-week drama worship program affected youth spiritual development at Joy Korean Church through their cognitive learning and affective bonding and conative spiritual practice. The program designers created this program to help second-generation Korean immigrants who attend

church services because their faith experiences conflict with their cultural background and their parents' beliefs and their inability to speak the native language. The project combined embodied Scripture with reflective journaling and communal dialogue to develop a complete spiritual experience which people could experience in their daily lives.

The six-session drama worship program used biblical stories which taught participants about listening and trust and doubt and prayer and obedience and perseverance. The program allowed participants to experience Scripture through both biblical interpretation and group dialogue and physical performance and collective thinking activities. The participants studied 1 Samuel 3 and Genesis 12 and John 20 and 1 Kings 19 and Matthew 14 and Philippians 1 to understand faith as an active process which affects the entire person through mental and emotional and physical involvement.

The pre- and post-survey data analysis showed significant development in all three aspects of faith development. The participants started with different levels of religious involvement, but all six participants developed better understanding of God's presence and guidance and they became more emotionally connected to their worship and prayer activities and they deepened their dedication to religious practices. The conative domain showed the biggest total increase because drama worship proved most successful at turning beliefs and emotions into enduring practices which extended past the session period.

The weekly journal entries and post-program reflection data provided additional qualitative evidence which supported these research results. The participants described how their understanding of faith evolved from seeing it as a duty or historical tradition

into a living relationship which exists through their body and continues throughout their life. Multiple participants reported that prayer became more confident for them while they became more comfortable sharing their doubts and they started to take a more active role in their church community. The final week reflections showed how previous spiritual experiences evolved into a unified process which drama worship used to activate and transform them.

The research confirmed that a six-week drama worship program which follows a specific design and maintains religious foundations will help immigrant church youth develop their spiritual development in all aspects. The research indicates that drama worship serves as a pastoral approach which unites educational teaching with emotional participation to create authentic discipleship experiences.

Future Considerations

Starting from the ground up, the shepherd at Joy Korean Church walks both leadership and study within immigrant congregations, seeing change as something always unfolding. This journey showed clear evidence that progress depends heavily on consistent attention over time. Though noticeable gains emerged after just six weeks, deeper insight comes from tracking what happens afterward and allowing stronger bonds to form through long-term follow-up. One thing worth noting is how members across diverse immigrant groups might take part in future phases. Because these populations carry rich cultural traditions, involving them adds depth to real world applications. When studies draw from broader populations with varied backgrounds, the results tend to apply to more situations. Instead of relying on assumptions, using organized methods to record

actions such as documenting prayers or reviewing volunteer engagement can reveal meaningful patterns in inner motivation shaped by faith.

Findings also indicate that parents must take a more active role in their children's spiritual development. Within immigrant church contexts, practices such as family dialogue circles and intergenerational worship, where grandparents and older members participate alongside youth, create natural spaces for faith to be shared within the household. Through these relational rhythms, belief moves from instruction to lived experience. As this process unfolds, a framework emerges that guides believers from initial participation toward mature faith. Adults seeking deeper spiritual roots find space for renewal, while youth communities integrate formation into their shared rhythm without losing clarity. In this movement, embodied practice often precedes intellectual understanding, and what begins within the worship space gradually extends outward into everyday life through lived testimony.

At the same time, several limitations must be acknowledged. The relatively small sample size restricts the generalizability of the findings, and the developmental stage of youth participants must be carefully considered. Because church based special programs often carry implicit expectations for visible transformation, young participants may experience subtle pressure to demonstrate spiritual growth. Such an environment, while formative, can sometimes shape responses through external motivation rather than purely internal conviction. Therefore, future research and ministry practice must strive to cultivate spaces where authentic spiritual formation is nurtured through grace, patience, and relational accompaniment rather than performance driven expectations. Within such a context, storytelling in motion embodied through drama worship continues to offer a

meaningful pathway for helping young believers internalize faith, form resilient spiritual identity, and live out God's narrative beyond the boundaries of childhood and into lifelong discipleship.

APPENDIX A

PRE AND POST QUESTIONNAIRES

Spiritual Growth Survey

Cognitive (Understanding & Awareness of Faith)

1. How confident are you in recognizing when God is speaking to you?

   (Scale: 1 - Not confident at all / 5 - Very confident)

2. How often do you think about how God is involved in your daily life?

   (Scale: 1 - Never / 5 - All the time)

3. In what ways do you believe God communicates with people today?

   (Multiple choice: Through the Bible, Prayer, Circumstances, Other people, Inner thoughts, Other: __*)*

4. Have you ever experienced a moment where you felt God was speaking to you?

   (Yes / No / Not sure — if yes, please explain briefly: __*)*

5. How clearly do you understand the connection between faith and your daily decision-making?

   (Scale: 1 - Not at all / 5 - Very clearly)

Affective (Emotional & Spiritual Connection with God)

1. How personally connected do you feel to God?

   (Scale: 1 - Not connected at all / 5 - Very connected)

2. How comfortable are you expressing your faith struggles or doubts?

   (Scale: 1 - Very uncomfortable / 5 - Very comfortable)

3. When facing challenges, how often do you turn to God for guidance?

   (Scale: 1 - Never / 5 - Always)

4. Do you feel engaged in worship experiences at church?

   (Scale: 1 - Not at all / 5 - Very engaged)

Conative (Behavioral & Action-Oriented Faith Commitment)

1. How often do you pray outside of church?

   (Scale: 1 - Never / 5 - Daily)

2. How often do you read the Bible on your own?

   (Scale: 1 - Never / 5 - Daily)

3. How often do you participate in faith-related activities (Bible studies, youth group, volunteering)?

   (Scale: 1 - Never / 5 - Very frequently)

4. When faced with a difficult decision, how often do you seek guidance through prayer?

   (Scale: 1 - Never / 5 - Always)

5. Do you feel motivated to grow in your faith?

   (Scale: 1 - Not at all / 5 - Very motivated)

Post-Program Survey Questions

The following set of questions will be administered at the conclusion of the six-week program to evaluate participants' growth in three key areas: cognitive understanding of faith, emotional and spiritual connection with God, and behavioral commitment to faith practices. These post-program survey questions are designed to measure any changes in the students' faith perception and engagement, particularly as influenced by their participation in the drama worship curriculum. The responses will be compared with the pre-survey results to assess the overall spiritual development experienced during the project.

Cognitive (Understanding & Awareness of Faith Growth)

1. How likely are you now to identify when God is speaking to you?

   (Scale: 1 - Not likely at all / 5 - Very likely)

2. Have you discovered any new ways in which God may speak to you?

   _(Yes / No / I'm not sure — please explain if yes: __)

3. In what ways do you believe God communicates with people today?

   (Multiple choice: Through the Bible, Prayer, Circumstances, Other people, Inner thoughts, Other: __)

4. Have you ever experienced a moment during this program where you felt God was speaking to you?

   (Yes / No / Not sure)

5. How has this program changed your understanding of God's role in your daily life?

   (Open-ended response)

Affective (Emotional & Spiritual Connection with God)

1. Are you more religious/spiritually connected now than before the program?

   _(Yes / No / I'm not sure — please explain: __)

2. Can you describe a moment during this project when you clearly felt God's presence?

   (Open-ended response)

3. How did you experience drama worship as a form of worship?

   (Scale: 1 - Not at all / 5 - Very much)

4. How has it changed your worship experience in regular church services?

   (Open-ended response optional)

5. Conative (Behavioral & Action-Oriented Faith Commitment)

6. How has your prayer life changed since the beginning of this program?

   (Scale: 1 - No change / 5 - More frequent and more purposeful)

7. How often do you now read the Bible on your own compared to before?

   (Scale: 1 - Less than before / 3 - Same / 5 - More than before)

8. Have you made any new commitments to grow in your faith?

   _(Yes / No — if yes, please explain: __)

9. What is the likelihood that you will continue or increase participation in faith-based activities (e.g., small groups, Bible studies)?

   (Scale: 1 - Not likely / 5 - Very likely)

APPENDIX B

SERMON MENUSCRIPTS

Week 1

Hearing and Discerning God's Voice

Text: 1 Samuel 3:1–10; John 10:27

Today, we are talking about one simple but deep question: How do we hear God, and how do we know it is really Him? Hearing and discerning are not two separate things. They grow together.

In 1 Samuel 3, the Bible says, "The word of the Lord was rare." It felt silent. But God was not silent. God called, "Samuel… Samuel…" Samuel heard a voice, but he did not recognize it. Why?

Because he had not yet learned how to listen. Sometimes we think, "I don't hear God." But often the truth is that we are surrounded by too many voices. Our lives are filled with noise, stress, fear, distractions, and our own thoughts. In the middle of all these voices, it becomes difficult to recognize the voice of God.

God is speaking, but we must become still in order to hear. Samuel heard the voice three times. But each time he misunderstood it. This shows us that hearing alone is not enough. We must also learn to discern.

Today many voices speak into our lives. Fear tells us that we are not enough. Pressure tells us that we must succeed. Our emotions tell us to follow whatever we feel in the moment. Culture tells us to follow ourselves and trust our own desires. Sometimes we confuse these voices with the voice of God. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me." (John 10:27)

Notice the order. First they hear, then they know, and finally they follow. Hearing leads to knowing and knowing leads to following.

So, how do we recognize and discern God's voice

God's voice has a character. When God speaks, His voice brings peace rather than panic. It leads us toward truth instead of confusion. It draws our hearts toward God instead of turning us inward toward ourselves. His voice invites us with love rather than pushing us with fear, and it produces conviction that leads us to repentance instead of shame that drives us away.

Often God's voice is not loud. It may come as a quiet inner pull, a gentle correction, a deep sense of peace, or a clear truth that settles in our hearts. It is not emotional noise or chaotic pressure. It is steady clarity.

We can learn to hear and discern through relationships. Samuel needed Eli to help him understand what was happening.

Through Eli's guidance he learned to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

In the same way, we grow in hearing and discerning God's voice through relationship with Him. We learn through Scripture, because God will never contradict His Word. We learn through prayer as we slow down and make space to listen. We learn through the Holy Spirit, who gently guides our hearts. We also learn through community, because other believers help us see what we cannot see by ourselves.

Hearing and discerning God's voice grow through relationship. The more we walk with God, the more familiar His voice becomes.

If we are honest, sometimes the real problem is not that God is unclear. The real problem is that we do not always want what God says. When God speaks, He often calls us to trust Him when we feel afraid, to let go when we want control, to forgive when we feel hurt, to obey when it feels uncomfortable, and to wait when we want immediate answers.

We often say, "God, speak to me."

But deep inside what we sometimes mean is, "God, agree with me." True listening requires surrender.

Friends, God is still speaking. So today the real question is not simply, "Can I hear God?"

The deeper questions are these: Am I still enough to hear?

Am I learning to discern His voice? And am I willing to follow when He speaks?

Let this be our prayer tonight:

"Speak, Lord. Help me hear Your voice. Help me discern Your voice. Help me follow Your voice." Amen.

Week 2

Faith in Uncertainty

Text: Genesis 12:1–4

Hi, Everyone,

Faith often grows not in clarity but in uncertainty. The story of Abram in Genesis 12 illustrates this truth. God calls Abram to leave his homeland and journey toward a land

that God will reveal later. God does not provide a map or detailed explanation. Instead, God offers a promise.

The passage repeatedly emphasizes the words “I will.” God promises to bless Abram, to make his name great, and to bless all nations through him. Abram’s journey therefore begins not with certainty about the future but with trust in the character of God.

Today’s culture encourages control, planning, and guaranteed outcomes. When God’s guidance feels unclear, people often experience anxiety and fear. Yet Abram demonstrates that faith begins when individuals trust the One who calls rather than relying on complete knowledge of the path ahead.

Faith in uncertainty does not eliminate questions or fear. Instead it involves taking a step forward while trusting that God will continue to guide the journey. Abram’s story reminds believers that the foundation of faith is not perfect information but faithful relationship.

Week 3

From Doubt to Faith

Text: John 20:24–29

Good morning, everyone.

Have you ever prayed and felt that nothing happened? Have you ever asked God for help but felt only silence in return? Perhaps you have wondered, “God, are You even listening?”

Many of us who live between cultures understand this feeling very deeply. At home we speak one language, while at school we speak another. At church we talk about

faith, yet in the world we face pressure, fear, and uncertainty. Somewhere in between these different spaces of life, quiet questions often rise in our hearts. We begin to wonder whether God is there, why He does not answer us, and why we still feel alone.

If you have ever felt this way, it does not mean that you are weak. It means you are human. The good news is that today's passage tells us we are not alone in this struggle. One of Jesus' own disciples once stood exactly where we sometimes stand today. His name was Thomas.

When Jesus first appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, Thomas was not with them. Scripture specifically notes that "Thomas was not with them." This small detail is very important. Doubt often grows strongest when we are alone. When we isolate ourselves, our thoughts can become louder, darker, and heavier. Our minds begin to repeat the same fears again and again. We start thinking that God did not answer us, that God is silent, and perhaps even that God does not care.

But the gospel tells a different story. Jesus did not abandon Thomas. Eight days later, Jesus came back again, and this time Thomas was there. Jesus came even though Thomas had doubted, even though he had struggled, and even though he had questioned everything. Jesus came for him.

What Thomas needed in that moment was not a philosophical explanation or a theological lecture. He needed assurance. And what did Jesus give him? Not a sermon and not a long explanation. Instead, Jesus showed him His wounds and said, "Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side." Jesus did not respond by asking why Thomas was weak. Instead, He simply said, "Here I am."

This moment reveals something essential about faith. Faith is not the absence of questions. Faith is the presence of Jesus even when our answers remain incomplete.

Sometimes we assume that strong faith means never experiencing doubt. Yet the Bible shows something different. Thomas doubted, but he eventually became one of the strongest confessors of Christ when he declared, “My Lord and my God.” In many ways, faith grows through doubt rather than in the absence of it.

Missiologist Paul Hiebert once explained that worldview transformation does not happen instantly. It develops gradually through relationship and lived experience. Faith is not built in a single moment of perfect clarity. Instead, it is formed through enduring presence, through continuing to walk with Jesus day after day. Faith grows not through perfect answers or emotional highs but through a steady relationship with Christ.

Resilient faith therefore does not claim that believers will never struggle. Instead, resilient faith says something deeper: even when I struggle, I will not walk away. There may be moments when prayer feels unanswered. There may be seasons when God feels silent. Life may feel confusing and uncertain.

Yet we must remember this truth. Silence is not the same as absence. Delay is not the same as rejection. Struggle is not the same as failure. Just as Jesus entered the locked room where Thomas was hiding, He also enters our doubts, our fears, and our unanswered prayers. He may not always provide immediate solutions, but He always brings His presence.

Week 4

Prayer and Listening

Text: 1 Kings 19:11–13

Let me ask you something honestly: Have you ever prayed hard for something — and felt absolutely nothing in return? No sign. No change. No emotional reassurance. Just silence.

For many of us, doubt doesn't begin with rebellion.

It begins with unanswered prayer.

Elijah had just experienced one of the greatest miracles in Scripture. Fire from heaven. A public victory. A spiritual high. But immediately after that moment, he receives a death threat from Queen Jezebel. And suddenly, the bold prophet runs for his life.

He collapses under a tree and says:

"It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life."

Elijah is exhausted. Afraid. Spiritually drained.

And perhaps most painful of all — he feels alone.

God sends him to Mount Horeb. And there, something strange happens.

A powerful wind tears through the mountains.

But the Lord is not in the wind.

An earthquake shakes the ground.

But the Lord is not in the earthquake.

A fire passes by.

But the Lord is not in the fire.

Then comes what the Hebrew describes as a “thin silence” — a gentle whisper.

And Elijah covers his face.

Why?

Because he recognizes it.

God was not absent.

God was simply not loud.

We often look for God in the dramatic ways!

We want instant clarity, immediate healing or emotional confirmation.

Sometimes we find obvious signs. We assume that if God is real, He will interrupt our lives in spectacular ways. But Scripture shows us something deeper. Sometimes God is not in the spectacular. Sometimes He waits for quiet.

In our world — especially as teenagers — silence is uncomfortable. Our lives are full of notifications, music, group chats, social media scrolling and constant comparison with others. We are never alone with our thoughts. And when we finally are alone, anxiety gets louder.

But what if God is not competing with the noise?

What if He waits beneath it?

Let me say something today, the silence does not mean absence. This is crucial.

Elijah thought he was alone. He thought he was the only faithful one left.

But later in the chapter, God tells him: “I have reserved seven thousand in Israel…”

Elijah’s perception was distorted by exhaustion and fear.

Sometimes when we say, “God isn’t answering,” what we really mean is that He is not answering the way we expected. Silence is not neglected. Silence can be formation. When God whispers, He is inviting relationship rather than performance. A whisper requires closeness. You do not whisper to someone far away; you whisper to someone who is near. Prayer, therefore, is not only about speaking to God. It is also about listening. Many of us think prayer is a way of convincing God, but in reality, prayer is about aligning ourselves with Him. Elijah did not receive a long explanation from God. Instead, he received directions. God simply told him to go back the way he came. God did not remove every difficulty in Elijah’s life, but He restored Elijah’s purpose.

Sometimes we pray because we want escape from our circumstances, yet God answers by giving us a calling. Sometimes we pray for emotional relief, yet God responds with a steady presence. If we measure prayer only by dramatic change, we may miss the quiet transformation that is happening inside us. Spiritual maturity is not built on constant spiritual heights. It is built on faithful presence, even in silence.

Many of you live between cultures. At church you hear about faith in powerful and emotional language, but at school faith may feel distant, intellectual, or even irrelevant. Because of this, you may sometimes wonder why God does not feel real in your everyday life. Elijah’s story reminds us that God is not limited to moments of emotional intensity. He is present in the ordinary rhythms of life. Not every season will feel like Mount Carmel, where fire falls from heaven. Some seasons feel more like caves. Yet caves are not failures. They are listening to spaces where God gently meets us.

As we think about this passage, I want to offer a practical challenge for this week. Set aside five minutes each day to be still before God. Put away your phone, turn off music, and remove distractions. Simply sit quietly and say, “God, I am listening.” Do not try to force thoughts or chase emotional feelings. Just be present with Him. You may not hear an audible voice, but over time you may notice subtle changes within your heart. Your heart may become softer. Your sense of direction may become clearer. A deeper steadiness may begin to grow within you. In these quiet moments, God’s whisper shapes our souls.

Week 5

Taking Action in Faith

Text: Matthew 14:28–31

Dear Friend,

Faith ultimately calls believers to action. In Matthew 14 Peter steps out of the boat in response to Jesus’ invitation to walk on water. Although Peter begins with courage, fear soon overwhelms him and he begins to sink. Yet Jesus immediately reaches out and lifts him up.

This story demonstrates that faith does not eliminate fear. Instead faith involves trusting Christ enough to step forward even when fear remains present. Obedience does not require perfect confidence but willingness to respond to Christ’s call.

Believers are therefore invited not only to hear God’s voice but also to act upon it. Spiritual growth occurs when listening leads to obedience and when trust leads to action.

APPENDIX C

DRAMA SCRIPTS

Week 1 - Drama Script

Hearing and Discerning God's Voice

Biblical Text: 1 Samuel 3:1–10; John 10:27
Theme: Learning to recognize and discern God's voice.

Scene 1 – Trying to Hear

(Student sits alone. A phone lies beside him. The room is quiet.)

Student: God… I want to hear You. Everyone says You speak, but I don't hear anything.

(The phone vibrates.)

Voice of Pressure: You are falling behind. Think about your grades. Your future. Success. Focus on what really matters.

Student: Maybe… maybe I should worry about that first.

Voice of Fear: What if God never answers you? What if you are completely alone?

Student: God… are You even there?

Voice of Self
Just follow what you feel. You do not need anyone telling you what to do.

(The student looks overwhelmed.)

Scene 2 – Too Many Voices

(Student covers his ears.)

Student: There are too many voices. I cannot hear anything clearly.

(Mentor enters slowly.)

Mentor: What are you listening to?

Student: I am trying to hear God, but all I hear is noise.

Mentor: Sometimes the problem is not that God is silent. Sometimes we are simply listening to everything else. Be still. Listen carefully. And say this: Speak, Lord, I am listening.

Scene 3 – Learning to Discern

(The student takes a deep breath and closes his eyes.)

Student: Speak, Lord. I am listening. Speak, Lord. I am listening……

(The voices return one by one.)

Voice of Fear: You are not enough.

Student: That voice brings fear.

Voice of Pressure: You must prove yourself.

Student: That voice pushes me with pressure.

Voice of Self: Do whatever you want.

Student: That voice only leads back to myself.

(The room becomes quiet.)

Scene 4 – God Speaks

(A soft light appears.)

God's Voice: I am here. Do not be afraid. You belong to me. Walk with me.

(Student wipes tears from his eyes.)

Student: This voice brings peace. This voice leads me to God. Lord… I hear You.

Scene 5 – Understanding

Mentor: Do you see now?

Student: Yes. Hearing is not enough. I must also discern. Some voices bring fear. Some voices bring pressure. But God's voice brings peace and leads me to Him.

Mentor
Then keep listening and keep following.

Final Moment

(All voices fade except God's voice.)

Student: Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening.

(The lights slowly fade.)

Week 2 Drama Script

Faith in Uncertainty

Biblical Text: Genesis 12:1–4
Theme: Trusting God when the future is unclear.

Scene 1 – The Question

(A student sits alone at a table with a notebook and phone. The room feels quiet but tense.)

Student: God… I keep asking You what to do. I prayed about this decision so many times. Everyone says You guide people, but I do not know what You want.
(The student sighs.)

Student: If You are there, could You just make it obvious? Just tell me the answer.

(Silence.)

Student: Why does it feel like You are not answering?

Scene 2 – A Friend Appears

(Friend enters and sits beside the student.)

Friend: You look stressed. What is going on?

Student: I have a decision to make, and I am afraid of choosing wrong. I keep asking God for guidance, but I feel nothing.

Friend: What kind of decision?

Student: It affects my future. If I choose one direction, people might not understand. If I choose another direction, I might regret it.

Friend: Maybe the problem is not that God is silent. Maybe the problem is that you want complete certainty.

Student: Of course I want certainty. Who would not?

Scene 3 – The Story of Abram

(The Pastor or Mentor enters slowly.)

Pastor: Can I share a story with you?

Student: Sure.

Pastor: In the Bible, Genesis 12, God called Abram to leave everything familiar and go to a land that God would show him later.

Student: Wait… God did not tell him where he was going?

Pastor: Not exactly. God gave him a promise before He gave him the destination.

Student: That sounds terrifying.

Pastor: Yes, but Abram trusted the One who called him.

Scene 4 – The Struggle

(Student stands and begins pacing.)

Student: I think I understand the story, but it is still scary. What if I make the wrong choice?

Pastor: Faith does not mean you will never make mistakes. Faith means trusting that God continues to guide you even when you are unsure.

Student: So, Abram did not have certainty?

Pastor: No. He had something deeper. He trusted God's character.

Scene 5 – The Decision

(Student sits again, thinking quietly.)

Student: Maybe I keep asking God to show me the entire road. Maybe God is asking me to trust Him instead. (Student looks upward.)

Student: God… I still feel uncertain. But I want to trust You. If You are leading me, I will take the next step.

(Light softens.)

Narrator: Abram did not know the entire path. Yet he walked forward because he trusted the One who called him.

(Lights fade.)

Week 3 Drama Script

From Doubt to Faith

Biblical Text: John 20:24–29
Theme: Faith grows through encountering Christ even in moments of doubt.

Scene 1 – The Quiet Question
(A student sits alone after youth group. Others have left.)

Student: Everyone talks about how real God is to them. They say they feel His presence and hear His voice. I want to believe that too, but sometimes I am not sure what I believe.
(Student looks at phone with messages from friends discussing faith.)

Student: What if they are all sure and I am the only one who is not?

Scene 2 – Honest Conversation
(Friend enters.)

Friend: Hey, you stayed late. Everything okay?

Student: Can I ask you something honestly?

Friend: Of course.

Student: Do you ever doubt your faith?

Friend: Sometimes. Why?

Student: Because I do. I keep wondering if God is really there or if I am just believing what I was taught growing up.

Friend: You know, one of Jesus' disciples struggled with that too.

Student: Really?

Friend: Thomas.

Scene 3 – The Story

Friend: When the other disciples said they saw Jesus after the resurrection, Thomas said he would not believe unless he saw Jesus himself.

Student: That sounds exactly like what I feel.

Friend: But Jesus did not reject Thomas. Later He appeared again and showed him the wounds in His hands.

Student: What did Thomas say?

Friend: He said, “My Lord and my God.”

Scene 4 – Realization

(Student sits quietly.)

Student: So, Thomas doubted first?

Friend: Yes.

Student: And Jesus still came to him?

Friend: Yes.

Student: Maybe doubt does not mean faith is gone. Maybe it means faith is still searching.

Scene 5 – Encounter

(Student looks upward.)

Student: God… I still have questions. But I want to keep searching for You. If You are real, help me know You.

(Narrator speaks softly.)

Narrator: Thomas’ doubt did not end his story. It became the place where he encountered Christ.

(Lights fade.)

Week 4 Drama Script

Prayer and Listening

Biblical Text: 1 Kings 19:11–13
Theme: Recognizing God’s presence in quietness rather than dramatic experiences.

Scene 1 – Frustrated Prayer

(A student sits alone with a Bible and journal.)

Student: God… I have been praying about this for weeks. I keep asking for help, but nothing seems to change.

(Student closes journal.)

Student: If You are there, why does it feel like You are silent?

Scene 2 – Conversation

(Friend enters and sits nearby.)

Friend: You look discouraged. What happened?

Student: I prayed and prayed, but I feel like God is not answering.

Friend: Maybe the answer is not what you expected.

Student: What do you mean?

Friend: Do you remember the story of Elijah on Mount Horeb?

Scene 3 – The Story

Friend: Elijah saw powerful things like wind, an earthquake, and fire.
But the Bible says God was not in any of those.

Student: So where was God?

Friend: In a whisper.

Student: A whisper?

Friend: Yes. Something quiet enough that Elijah had to listen carefully.

Scene 4 – Reflection

(Student thinks quietly.)

Student: Maybe I keep expecting something dramatic. Maybe I am waiting for something big while missing something quiet.

Friend: Sometimes God is not competing with the noise. Sometimes He waits for us to become still.

Scene 5 – A New Approach

(Student puts phone aside.)

Student: Maybe I should try something different. (Student closes eyes.)

Student: God… I am not asking for a sign right now. I just want to listen.

(Narrator speaks softly.)

Narrator: In quietness Elijah recognized the presence of God.

(Lights fade.)

Week 5 Drama Script

Taking Action in Faith

Biblical Text: Matthew 14:28–31
Theme: Responding to God's guidance with courage and obedience.

Scene 1 – The Opportunity

(Student sits with friends discussing a service opportunity or leadership role.)

Friend: They are asking for volunteers to help lead the next event.

Student: That sounds interesting… but I am not sure I am ready.

Friend: Why not?

Student: What if I fail?

Scene 2 – The Fear

(Student alone later.)

Student: God, I think You might want me to do this… but I am scared.

Student: What if I embarrass myself?

Scene 3 – Remembering the Story

(Mentor enters.)

Mentor: You seem worried. Do you have any problems? I wish to help you, if I can.

Student: Hmm…I think God might be asking me to step out and try something new.

Mentor: Do you remember Peter walking on the water?

Student: Yes, I listen the sermon you preach!

Mentor: Right, Peter was afraid too. But he stepped out of the boat.

Scene 4 – The Choice

(Student thinks quietly.)

Student: But you know? Peter started sinking, though.

Mentor: Yes, but Jesus caught him.

Student: So the real mistake would be never stepping out.

Mentor: Exactly.

Scene 5 – The Step of Faith

(Student looks upward.)

Student: God… I am still nervous. But if You are calling me, I will try.

(Narrator speaks.)

Narrator: Faith begins when believers trust Christ enough to take the next step.

(Lights fade.)

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